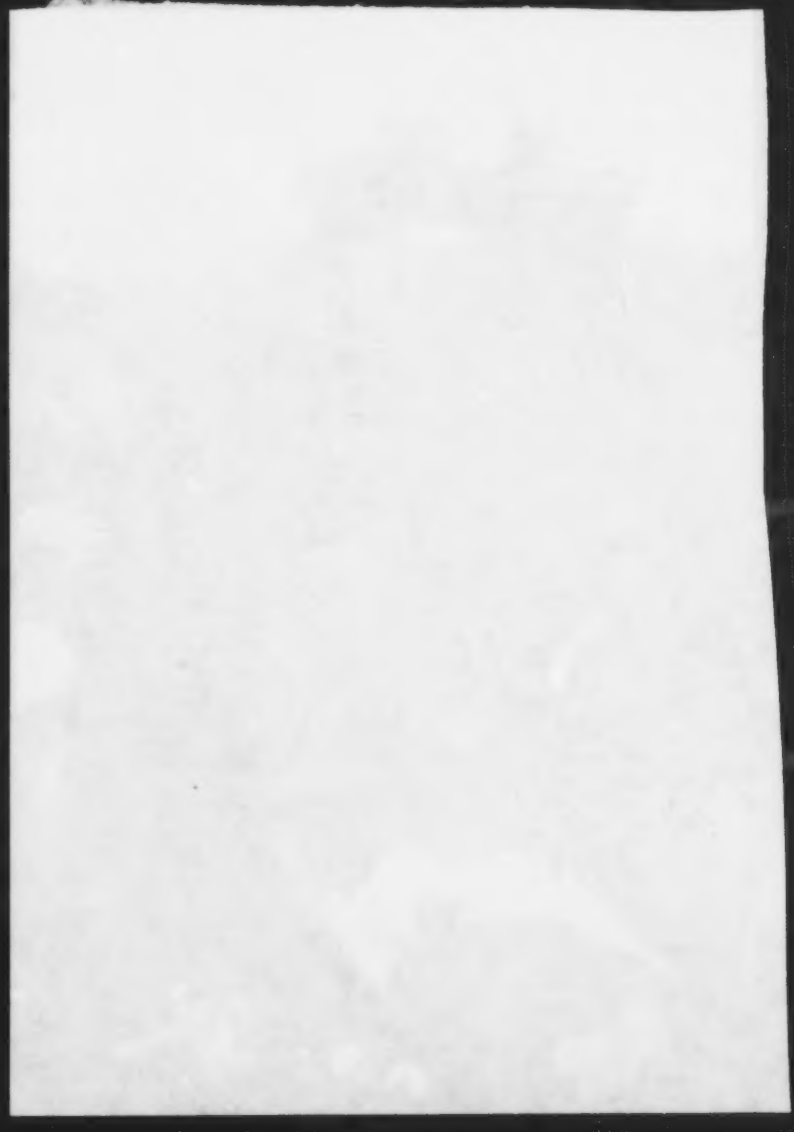
n° 93
August 1993

focus:

Refugees



UNHCR
United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees

C O N T

FOCUS

Ethnic conflict

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Refugees is published by the Public Information Service of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The opinions expressed by contributing editors are not necessarily those of UNHCR. The designations used do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of UNHCR concerning the legal status of a territory or of its authorities.

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English and French editions printed in Switzerland by AIAR sa, Geneva
Circulation: 200,000 in English, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish

ISSN 0252-791 X

Cover: Nagarno-Karabakh
Women mourn slain Armenian

Photo: © Max Stevenson, Sygma

READEX
FICHE

Ethnic conflict and refugees

Selected ethnic conflicts around the world, 1993:

1. Abkhazians and Georgians
2. Albanians and Serbs
3. Armenians and Azerbaijani
4. Asian (Indian) Fijians and Indigenous Fijians
5. Assamese in India
6. Baganda/Banyarward and Acholi/Langi in Uganda
7. Baha'i in Iran
8. Basques in Spain and France
9. Bodo in India
10. Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs
11. Catalans in Spain
12. Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland
13. Chakma in Bangladesh
14. Chechen/Ingush in Russia
15. Copts in Egypt
16. Croats and Serbs
17. Foreigners in Germany
18. French-Canadians
19. Greek and Turkish Cypriots
20. Hausa and Yoruba in Nigeria
21. Hindus and Muslims in India
22. Hungarians in Romania
23. Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi and Rwanda
24. Ingush and Ossetes in Russian and Georgia
25. Kabiye and Ewe in Togo

For the past several years, ethnic conflict has been the world's most common form of collective violence and a major cause of the steadily increasing refugee problem.

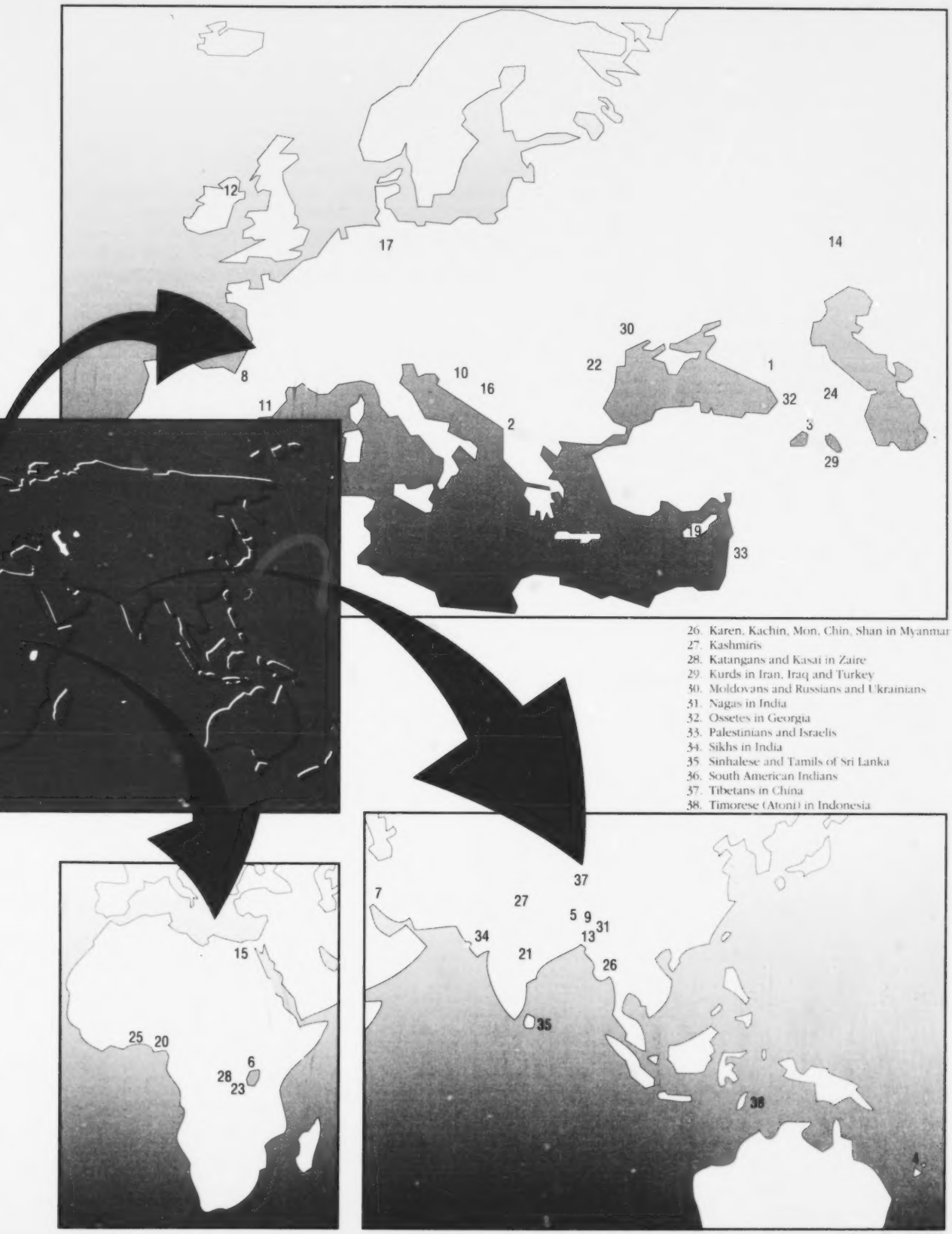
Ethnic conflict is generally defined as a violent conflict between or among groups who differ from each other in terms of culture, religion, physical features, or language.

In 1988, the majority of the 111 violent conflicts in the world involved minority and majority groups within nations. In July 1993, we find no less than 25 ethnic conflicts that involve the regular use of violence — mass killings, executions, terrorist bombings, assassination, looting, rapes, forced expulsion, and other acts of violence — by one or both groups to achieve their aims.

In addition, there are several dozen other conflicts that are mostly non-violent and hundreds of examples of political, economic, or cultural repression that may eventually erupt into open conflict and violence.

Although our attention is always drawn to the bloodiest and most protracted of conflicts — Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland; Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, and Croats in the Balkans; Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka; Kurds in the Middle East; Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh — we should not ignore the many non-violent conflicts that are the seedbeds of future violence. Non-violent ethnic conflict often takes the form of political, economic, or cultural repression of ethnic minorities and includes restrictions on voting, burdensome taxes, exclusion from certain professions, residential isolation, educational quotas, prohibitions on the use of the ethnic language, and restrictions on religious worship.

A 1989 survey lists 261 minority



26. Karen, Kachin, Mon, Chin, Shan in Myanmar
27. Kashmiris
28. Katangans and Kasai in Zaire
29. Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Turkey
30. Moldovans and Russians and Ukrainians
31. Nagas in India
32. Ossetes in Georgia
33. Palestinians and Israelis
34. Sikhs in India
35. Sinhalese and Tamils of Sri Lanka
36. South American Indians
37. Tibetans in China
38. Timorese (Atoni) in Indonesia

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▶ groups (many of them ethnic) in 99 of 126 nations as the victims of such oppression, suggesting a long and troubled future for ethnic relations around the world.

Ethnic conflict often involves more than just conflict between groups. Sometimes there is conflict between factions within each group, and often other nations and peoples become involved. In Sri Lanka, for example, the conflict between the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils has been accompanied by assassinations and riots between political factions in both groups and violence directed at Muslims in Sri Lanka. Similar situations have occurred in Northern Ireland, Azerbaijan, and elsewhere as political rivals and their followers battle for influence and power. Often the key policy distinction between the factions is their support for peaceful-accommodation resolutions to the conflict versus violence-conquest resolutions.

At the international level, ethnic conflicts usually also involve nations and citizens of nations who are not direct combatants in the conflict. Ethnic conflicts, for example, are a major source of refugees and displaced persons who seek safety in non-involved nations or nations that are supportive of their interests, or in nations with large ethnic confederate populations.

Such large ethnic refugee populations put heavy economic, social, and political stress on the host nation and may lead to xenophobia and ethnic conflict within that country. The burden can also give the host nation a stake in seeing the external conflict quickly resolved.

While those forced to flee are usually members of the warring groups, other non-combatants may be affected as well. For example, in Sri Lanka, hundreds of thousands of Muslims not involved in the conflict fled from the eastern Tamil region to safety in western areas. This is in addition to the Tamils who fled north and east and out of the country and the Sinhalese who fled south.

In addition to accepting refugees, nations with an interest in the conflict or ties to one of the groups may choose to become directly involved. They can do this by assisting one ethnic group, as with the British in

An Iraqi refugee family fleeing to Iran in April 1991.
PHOTO : UNHCR / J. STJERNEKLAR

Ethnic conflicts are a major source of refugees and displaced persons who seek safety in non-involved nations, nations that are supportive of their interests, or in nations with large ethnic confederate populations.

Northern Ireland, Turkey and Greece in Cyprus, or India in Sri Lanka, among others. Additionally, even if a government remains officially neutral or uninvolved, its citizens will often support members of their ethnic group in another nation, as in Jewish support for Israel and Irish-American support for Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland. For many people, mother country sentiments remain powerful and feelings of ethnic solidarity quickly convert into political and economic support when the security of the homeland is threatened.

Ethnic conflicts are not all the same, and take a variety of forms. One key distinction is between conflicts that occur in unranked situations versus those in ranked situations. In an unranked situation the ethnic groups are relatively equal in power or perceive themselves to be so. In a ranked situation, the ethnic groups in a nation are ordered in a hierarchy of power. Conventional wisdom holds that ethnic conflicts will be more common and less amenable to control in unranked situations where the groups are in competition for wealth and power and where one group is not powerful enough to repress the others.

Another distinction is between conflicts in the developing world and those in industrialized countries. The former often center on competition between ethnic groups for political dominance while the latter often involve separatist movements by ethnic minorities and repression by the government.

A third distinction can be made among different types of violent ethnic conflict on the basis of the goals of the participants in the conflict. From this perspective, violent conflicts in the world today fall into four categories:

■ *Separatist movements.*
Violence occurs as part of an effort by an ethnic group to become politically independent, or as part of an effort by a nation to prevent the group from doing so. Examples are the Armenians in Azerbaijan; Basques in France and Spain; Catholics in Northern Ireland; Abkhazians in Georgia; Ossetes in Georgia; Palestinians in Israel (and Israeli-occupied territories); Kashmiri in Kashmir; Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Turkey; Sikhs in India; Tibetans in China; Timorese (Atoni) in Indonesia; and Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka.

■ *Rivalry for autonomy or political power or territorial control.*
Violence occurs as part of a conflict between ethnic groups in one nation, or between an ethnic group and the government over access to and control of economic resources, political power, territory, or political autonomy within the nation. When the goals of the group seeking autonomy, more power or wealth within the nation seem unattainable, they may shift their goal to complete separatism. Examples include Albanians in Serbia; Hungarians in Romania; Chechen/Ingush in Russia; Islamic fundamentalists in Algeria and Egypt; Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba in Nigeria; Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi; Kalenjin, Luo, Kikuyu, Luhya in Kenya; Xhosa/other groups and Zulu in South Africa; Bodo in India; Hindus and Muslims in India; Chakma in Bangladesh; Karen, Kachin, Mon in Myanmar; indigenous Fijians and Asian Fijians in Fiji.

■ *Conquest.*
Violence occurs as part of a war between two or more nations where ethnic differences between the groups is a major factor. The objective of the war might be the conquest of the other ethnic group or its removal from all or some of its territory. Examples include Bosnian Muslims and Serbs; and Croats and Serbs.

■ *Survival.*
Violence occurs as part of an attempt by a national government or majority groups to forcibly assimilate, harm, remove or drive out an ethnic minority. Examples are Turks and other non-ethnic Germans in Germany; Gypsies in Romania; Shiite Muslims in Iraq; Copts in Egypt; Nepalese in Bhutan; Muslims in Myanmar; Vietnamese in Cambodia; Amazonian Indian groups in Brazil.

Why do ethnic groups fight? As yet there is no good, complete answer to this question. And given the different types of ethnic conflict and the different situations in which they occur, the question may ultimately require several, perhaps related, answers.

In attempting to explain ethnic conflict in general as well as specific conflicts, we need to consider the basic nature and strength of ethnic ties, situational factors that may encourage the development of ethnic solidarity and ethnic-based competition, and the actual motives articu- ▶

lated by the groups. As regards ethnicity, political scientist Donald Horowitz reminds us that ethnic solidarity is "powerful, permeative, passionate, and pervasive." Additionally, some biologically-oriented researchers suggest that strong feelings of ethnic solidarity and ethnic conflict have their roots in human biological evolution and thus, it is not surprising that ethnic groups will fight to dominate other groups or to protect their own interests.

Another, though not necessarily contradictory line of thought, is that in many nations over the last several decades, ethnic groups have emerged or re-emerged as interest groups whose members coalesce as a means of gaining political and economic power. Recently, a number of situational factors have drawn special attention as causes of ethnic conflict, including the end of centralized rule in former communist nations, the end of colonial or colonial-style rule in Africa and Asia, the ideal of democracy, and economic inequalities between ethnic groups both within and across nations.

Many experts now believe that most ethnic conflicts are uniquely resistant to resolution and that the international community and national governments would be wiser to invest their resources in trying to manage and control these conflicts rather than in resolving them. Recent experience suggests that this is sound advice — while conflict resolution efforts do sometimes produce formal accords they rarely yield long-term peace and harmony.

Ethnic conflicts in Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Sri Lanka and northwest India have all been "settled" by accords, but the conflicts quickly flared up and continue. In most situations, ethnic conflicts end only through the subjugation or expulsion of one group by the other, a resolution that is likely to leave the loser unsatisfied and ready to resume the conflict when the opportunity presents itself in the future, which can be several decades away.

Ethnic conflicts are resolution resistant for a number of reasons. First, we need to remember Donald Horowitz's point that ethnic solidarity is "powerful, permeative, passionate, and pervasive."

Second, the stakes in ethnic conflicts are or are often believed by the combatants to be very high — the survival of their group, their domination by another group, or their domination of the other group. These are the very issues that precipitate the strong ethnic solidarity described by Horowitz and are ones members of ethnic groups are willing to kill and die for.

Third, ethnic conflicts are usually not just disputes about tangible objectives such as political control or access to employment, but also involve powerful xenophobic and ethnocentric feelings and symbols and the resulting scapegoating and stereotyping which tend to make such conflicts particularly impervious to rational resolution.

Fourth, the international experience has so far produced few permanent alternatives to ethnic conflict in multi-ethnic nations and regions. The United States is perhaps the only nation that holds to the view that a nation will be stronger by assimilating all peoples into one national whole, although that goal has yet to be achieved. A few other nations adhere to a pluralism model with groups sharing power, but of these, Canada is burdened by the French-Canadian separatist movement, and Switzerland by the Jura autonomy movement. While Belgium and Mauritius seem free of protracted, violent conflict, they along with Switzerland are unique situations that do not provide a model for most other nations.

Fifth, ethnic rights and ethnic conflict are neither legally recognized nor regulated at the international level. They are still to a large extent treated as internal matters, to be resolved by the nation itself. Unfortunately, in most situations the state itself is a party to the dispute or has a stake in the success of one group at the expense of another group. Thus, the state is often a self-interested and ineffective force for peaceful, long-term ethnic conflict resolution that leaves all parties satisfied.

Additionally, because ethnic conflicts are defined as internal matters, U.N. and multi-nation alliances have generally restricted their involvement to peacekeeping and rescue missions designed to limit the fighting. They have played a lesser role in long-term resolution. Similarly, the activities of non-governmental organizations are mostly geared to assisting refugees and displaced persons, and sheltering, feeding, and treating the victims.

What are some possible future hot spots? The present is the best predictor of the future. Thus, we can expect violent conflict to continue and to spread to other ethnic groups in the now independent republics of the former Soviet Union, in South Asia, in developing nations in Africa, and in Europe.

In the former Soviet republics, the conflict will most likely take two forms. First, it will continue to pit ethnic minorities against the majority groups such as the Abkhazians and the Georgians. Second, it will pit the national groups against the Russians who have settled in these nations since the 18th century and who occupied key economic and political positions during the Soviet period. We can expect that these Russian minorities will be forced to give up power and assimilate, and some will leave for Russia.

South Asia is already the arena for considerable ethnic unrest, including Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, Assamese and Bodo in northeastern India, Chakma and other tribal peoples in Bangladesh, Sikhs in India and Pakistan, Kashmiri in the disputed Kashmir region, Muslims and Hindus in India, and Burmese and ethnic minorities such as the Karen and Mon in Myanmar. Because of the overwhelming social and economic change in South Asia and the complex mix of ethnic, occupational (caste), religious and language groups, we can anticipate a continuing escalation of conflicts over access to political power and economic opportunity.

In the 40 nations of Africa, there are over 700 ethnic groups, large Muslim and Christian populations in the west, and rival groups in a number of countries already vying for political power. We can expect this pattern to continue in Africa, although not all conflict is along ethnic lines.

In Europe, we can expect a continuing pattern of conflict between ethnic minorities (including both linguistic minorities and national minorities) and the state in the former's quest for political autonomy or independence. Additionally, the emerging pattern of conflict and violence directed at non-European immigrants and refugees can be expected to continue.

Finally, in South America, the continuing violence directed at American Indians in the Amazon and elsewhere by those seeking to exploit the lumber and mineral and other resources of the region are likely to continue.

Many experts now believe that most ethnic conflicts are uniquely resistant to resolution and that it would be wiser to try to manage and control them rather than to resolve them.

David Levinson
Editor in chief
Encyclopedia of World Cultures

conflict

A PERSONAL VIEW FROM THE FIELD

UNHCR's role in ethnic conflict

Over the past two years, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has moved increasingly toward a new role — assisting and protecting internally displaced persons, often in situations of ethnic conflict. But there are many who continue to question this new direction: Why internally displaced persons? Why ethnic conflict?

A frank personal opinion, formed by recent field experience in Sri Lanka and the Commonwealth of Independent States, is that internally displaced persons are in particular humanitarian need. In relation to asylum-seekers, they are mostly the unlucky ones who have been unable to flee conflict and violence to other countries, usually because they don't have the resources and connections. Someone has got to help them.

Of course, the fundamental right to seek asylum must be upheld. But it is the moral duty of the international community to see that the world's estimated 20 million internally displaced people get a better deal — by way of both humanitarian aid and standards of treatment.

Moreover, to put it crudely, it is very much in the interest of the donor community to help the internally displaced or face the prospect of increasing numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees on their doorsteps.

By accepting a dynamically protective role in areas of ethnic conflict, UNHCR is coming to grips with a major cause of refugee displacement. I see UNHCR's role in ethnic conflict situations as taking its bearings from the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). From the U.N., the High Commissioner's moral authority derives directly from the General Assembly, permitting a certain autonomy from the politically orientated Secretariat. This autonomy is essential for a humanitarian organization.

With the ICRC, UNHCR coordinates closely and complements the ICRC mandate when regulations or resources do not permit it to act.

From the NGOs, UNHCR draw moral support and itself provides an operational framework within which complementary relief efforts can be organized.

With close coordination on the ground, there is little danger of duplication or overlapping. On the contrary, there is an essential but largely vacant role for an international organization which can provide a broader range of relief measures aimed at reducing conflict pressures on the affected population. It is this contribution that UNCHR is exceptionally well qualified to make, primarily because of the moral authority of the High Commissioner and the field skills and motivation of its staff.

My last five years in UNHCR were spent in countries of refugee origin, where the paramount problem has been not so much persons who had fled to another country for reasons of political persecution, but those who remained behind as victims of ethnic conflict. Most of this period was spent in Sri Lanka, and the latter part in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It was a time of immense bureaucratic frustration, offset partially by small contributions to a gradual change in thinking and the success of certain humanitarian initiatives on the ground.

The frustrations revolved around the fundamental question of UNHCR's mandate: Why should UNHCR concern itself with internally displaced persons when its founding statute clearly states that the High Commissioner's competence is for refugees who are outside their country of origin? Then there is the question of resources: Why should UNHCR take on extra mandatory commitments when some of its existing programs are under-funded? If internally displaced persons need international relief, the argument goes, this can be provided by the ICRC and/or international NGOs. If the

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The author, Bill Clarance, recently retired after 18 years with UNHCR. He served as representative in Viet Nam, Malaysia, Greece, Sri Lanka and the CIS.*

U.N. has to be involved, then UNDP, UNICEF or some agency other than UNHCR should take up the burden.

Such was the flak that the UNHCR branch office in Sri Lanka caught from Geneva in mid-1990 over a very modest proposal to provide emergency relief for refugees, displaced and other conflict affected persons in Mannar district.

The situation on the ground in northern Sri Lanka at that time was extremely complicated, and the raw humanitarian imperative which it imposed required that broad common sense should prevail. The resulting program helped clear some of the institutional inhibitions against UNHCR involvement with internally displaced persons and paved the way for a significantly protective role in areas of conflict.

Our answers to the objections raised by headquarters over our Sri Lanka involvement remain highly relevant for future areas of actual or potential conflict in which UNHCR might find itself — most notably in the successor states of the former Soviet Union.

Firstly, we were able to justify legally and practically our reasons for being in an area of ethnic conflict in the first place. UNHCR had already been present in the affected areas of Sri Lanka for more than two years to implement a program of rehabilitation for refugees repatriating from South India. Its action could, therefore, be justified on the grounds that there were voluntary repatriants within its traditional mandate whom it could not abandon. The legal position was also strengthened by UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 40 (XXXVI), which specified the High Commissioner's legitimate concern and right of access to voluntary repatriants.

From a humanitarian viewpoint, it was also argued that it was unacceptable to discriminate in the distribution of relief aid between refugees and displaced persons in conflict situations, when both were living close together and experiencing the same hardships. Distribution could not be other than evenhanded.

The common-sense approach that evolved helped strengthen the case for UNHCR involvement on grounds of timely and effective response. By the time the Sri Lankan Tamil displaced persons had arrived in India as refugees, any solution was much more problematic, not to mention costly, for the international community. In instances where those in flight were motivated large- ▶

▶ ly by the lack of basics like food, shelter, medical care, sanitation and security — all of which UNHCR could provide to a significant extent at very modest cost — the international community's moral duty to act was also supported by clear common sense.

Secondly, we were able to combine protective strategies and operational tactics. While in no way impeding the fundamental right to seek asylum, the overall aim of the Sri Lanka program in conflict areas was to reduce the pressures of fighting on the affected population to the maximum extent possible. Thus, logistically, the financing and organization of convoys to transport food provided by the government into LTTE-dominated areas under escort provided by international field staff not only helped feed the affected population, it provided a regular channel for UNHCR access to them.

It was likewise with the establishment of Open Relief Centers, or ORCs. These ORCs provide basic necessities such as shelter, food and medical care for displaced persons who are free to move into or out of the centers at will. But, just as important, ORCs are under UNHCR protection, with resident field officers and frequent back up missions from Colombo.

At the ORC at Pesalai on Mannar Island, for example, an agreement on conditions of access by the government security forces was negotiated with the Northern High Command. Ongoing radio contact was maintained with UNHCR in Colombo, which permitted immediate high-level intervention with the central government when local commanders failed to observe the agreed terms. While this arrangement was not an ironclad guarantee against unauthorized incursions by the military, it significantly strengthened security at Pesalai.

The sense of security this gave people living in the area around the Madhu ORC was illustrated by a remark from a nearby Tamil resident: "You don't have to live in Madhu (ORC) to feel the benefit of having UNHCR there — you can be in a village fifty miles away." Indeed, the open nature of the center meant that the surrounding population could seek safety there whenever they felt threatened, and leave when the situation improved. Some brought their livestock. Others slept in the ORC and made occasional visits back home to keep an eye on their property or to cultivate their crops.

Thirdly, we were able to demonstrate that there was no one else available to do the work. Once the Mannar relief program had become operational, its continued unpopularity in UNHCR headquarters prompted a quest to find alternative humanitarian organizations who might be prepared to take over its functions. These endeavors were highly instructive as to both the ways in which the agencies concerned interrelated with UNHCR in the field of conflict, and the general impact which the program was having on the situation.

Firstly, there was ICRC, which at that time had more than 70 delegates throughout Sri Lanka. The response of its chief delegate was that he supported what UNHCR was doing in Mannar, but did not have sufficient staff to take over its functions.

Then there was the U.N. — surely there was some other agency which could more appropriately perform UNHCR's functions in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict? If there had been Blue Helmets, no doubt UNHCR's functions could have been taken over by the civilian arm of peacekeeping operations. But UNPK was not there. Then there was UNICEF, but it was not interested in assuming the UNHCR role. UNDP felt the same way. Neither had the available field staff to do the job.

It soon became apparent that humanitarian relief in conflict situations was actively operational and required a type of field worker who was a significantly different sort of animal to the standard U.N. bureaucrat.

It soon became apparent that humanitarian relief in conflict situations required a different sort of animal than the standard U.N. bureaucrat

So might not the necessary skills and motivation be found in the NGOs? Medecins sans frontieres, Save the Children Fund, CARE, OXFAM, the Quakers and others were all performing essential relief functions in the affected areas with dedication and dynamism and, sometimes, in conditions of great personal danger. But while NGO staff would have been professionally suitable to take over most of the UNHCR relief functions, institutionally they did not have the resources nor, even more importantly, the clout with the government and military which UNHCR's status as an international organization brought. More than anything else, it was the U.N.'s status that enabled us to get by in the areas controlled by the military.

In the end, no substitute organization was found to carry on UNHCR's role, and we remained in Sri Lanka. Indeed, there was increasing realization that UNHCR was making an essential contribution which could not easily be made by any other agency.

THE NEXT CHALLENGE

"What on earth have refugees in Sri Lanka got to do with the Soviet Union?" This was a common question from diplomats in Colombo in November 1990, when news spread that I was leaving for Moscow.

"Plenty of internally displaced persons and ethnic conflict," was the quick reply.

The wide ethnic diversity of the old Soviet Union was exploited in the past as an instrument of policy, especially in strategic areas along the periphery. Some of the more negative results of this old policy had by now become all too apparent in terms of ethnic conflict — both actual (in the Transcaucasus) and potential (in Moldova and Central Asia). In the former, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan had already caused more than 500,000 people to flee their homes, and in Georgia open conflict had erupted in the north with the Ossets and was soon to break out in Abkhazia. Likewise in Moldova, hostilities between Transniestrian separatists and the central government were developing.

In Central Asia, internal dissension within Tajikistan was escalating toward open conflict. Moreover, the ethnic artificiality of some of the national frontiers, together with rising local pressures, indicated problems ahead for regionally indigenous peoples who were outside their traditional motherlands. These include the Uzbeks in Tajikistan or Kirghizstan, and Tajiks in Uzbekistan. Such problems were in addition to those of the diaspora of some 25 million Russian-speaking Slavs in the peripheral republics who, while not targeted as such, were feeling increasingly insecure.

The fundamental lesson learned from Sri Lanka is that international field staff outposted in the affected areas are essential, and that the sooner they are in place, the more protective — and indeed cost-effective — they are likely to be.

But this lesson was only applied very slowly in the CIS. The relative staffing levels of Colombo (a representative and five internationals) and Moscow (a representative and one junior international throughout most of 1992) underscored the lack of priority which the CIS was being given. Moreover, it was only at the end of 1992 and the beginning of 1993 that UNHCR established small operational presences in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Tajikistan.

In view of the immense humanitarian prevention task in the CIS, what role should UNHCR play? It alone does not have the capacity to tackle such a task on its own. But a wide variety of organizations could play a complementary role in a coordinated international program. For its part, UNHCR could contribute its experience, field skills and motivation to set the tone and provide the operational dynamism which such an initiative essentially requires.

But where would the overall framework and coordination come from? The United Nations? The recent efforts of its Secretariat in New York to incorporate all interagency activities in the CIS into U.N. Integrated Offices (UNIOs) under its own bureaucratically centralized direction have not been altogether crowned with success. Indeed, it has indicated a certain misperception of how international humanitarian protection works on the ground.

In any event, the U.N. would not be in a position to deliver the regional consensus on security guarantees which would be needed to underwrite any such program, and would unlikely be able to attract the major funding required. In such respects, the most likely provider, if it would accept the role, would be the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), to which all the successor states of the former Soviet Union and most of the major donors belong.

Bill Clarance

conflict

Passage to Jaffna

It costs a lot these days to travel to Jaffna, a pistol-shaped peninsula pointed at the head of Sri Lanka. Some even pay with their lives.

Since December, the government has cut off Jaffna, stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), from the rest of the northern region that the separatists control on the mainland of Sri Lanka. For civilian travelers, the only way in and out of Jaffna now is by boat across the Kilali Lagoon.

The LTTE, which has been fighting for a separate homeland for the mostly Hindu Tamil minority in the largely Buddhist Sinhalese nation, usually arranges the clandestine trip through the lagoon. As many as 350 boats ferrying between 2,000 and 2,500 people join each nocturnal run. Many travelers are visiting relatives on either side of the divide. Others are merchants who on their return carry commodities in short supply in Jaffna. The fare for the dangerous passage ranges from 300 rupees ($6) — equivalent to two days' wages for an average worker — to 3,000 rupees ($60). It is a rich source of revenue for the LTTE.

The trip begins when LTTE Sea Tigers attack government positions to divert attention away from the flotilla. Military officials say the LTTE guerrillas are using the civilians as human shields to travel in the lagoon. Soldiers lob grenades or open fire at the boats. Over 350 people were killed in the first two months of the year.

At the request of local authorities and NGOs, UNHCR initiated talks in December with both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government to open a "safe passage" for civilians to Jaffna across the Pooneryn Strait, at the western mouth of the lagoon. Concerned over the safety of civilians, the government promoted the safe corridor concept, but LTTE protests over the mechanics of crossing a 150-meter stretch of water in the strait forced a deadlock in the discussions by July.

Under the proposal, a ferry flying the UNHCR flag would cross between the jetties of Karitivu in the north to Sangupiddy in the south — the only viable route. UNHCR would establish a presence along the causeway, monitor the safe corridor and escort travelers. The government had proposed opening the only other route to Jaffna, a land corridor through the heavily mined Elephant Pass in the east. But the LTTE rejected the offer, fearing the government would use the road to attack Jaffna.

LTTE intransigence was blamed for the stalemate. But if the plan materializes, the UNHCR initiative could signal a significant first step in resolving the latest chapter in the country's long history of ethnic violence. It also could thrust UNHCR deeper into the new humanitarian role in which it has found itself in the post-Cold War era — operating in a conflict zone.

Some have high hopes for the negotiations over the safe passage plan.

"This is something that will create a new atmosphere," said the Rev. Philipupilla Jesurajah, administrator of the Roman Catholic diocese of Madhu in an LTTE-controlled region of northern Sri Lanka. "Both sides should trust each other — something that disappeared a long time ago. We hope this will lead to peace talks. The people are tired of the fighting."

At the Alles Gardens Camp run by UNHCR on the edge of the white sand beach of Trincomalee district — once a popular tourist resort — people like Rajadura Nadesen are waiting to go back to their villages. "Peace must come. Fighting must stop. There must be compromise," said Nadesen, 48, clad in sarong wrapped around his waist and

If the safe passage plan materializes, it could thrust UNHCR deeper into the humanitarian role in which it has found itself in the post-Cold War era -- operating in a conflict zone.

sweating profusely under the hot sun.

Nadesen has been in and out of camps over the past decade. He first abandoned his seven-acre rice farm at nearby Pankulam village in 1983 when communal violence that has been building up since the promulgation of the Sinhalese-only language act of 1956 engulfed Sri Lanka. The ethnic clashes dramatically changed the tranquil face of the nation of 13 million Sinhalese and 3 million Tamils that gained independence from Britain in 1948. The unrest also propelled the LTTE to the forefront of a Tamil separatist movement led by disillusioned young students in Jaffna. Over 130,000 people fled to India's southern state of Tamil Nadu, where the Sri Lankan Tamils originated, at the outset of the war that has since claimed thousands of lives and led to the assassinations of two of Asia's foremost leaders — Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India and President Ramasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka

Nadesen stayed in a camp in his home district for 18 months after the 1983 clashes. Then a fragile peace set in and Nadesen returned to his

Two returnees making brooms at a camp in Trincomalee district, Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: UNHCR / [illegible]

UNHCR trucks distributing government-gathered relief supplies for returnees and displaced persons at Madhu Open Relief Center, Mannar District.

photo: UNHCR/F. del Monte

village. But in 1985, armed men set 55 houses ablaze as anti-Tamil pogroms again erupted, sending him and his neighbors to an evacuation center where he stayed for two years. An accord in 1987 between Colombo and New Delhi led to the return of some 42,000 Tamils from India, assisted by UNHCR. That same year, Nadesen went back to his farm. But he did not stay long.

The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a suspected LTTE guerrilla in May 1991 during a visit to Tamil Nadu ignited a fresh round of bloodletting. Gandhi had sent an Indian peace keeping force to Sri Lanka and had ended up fighting the LTTE.

By 1992, an estimated 200,000 Sri Lankan refugees were in India — about 80,000 of them living with relatives and the rest staying in camps. Among the refugees was Nadesen's family. Nadesen had paid 2,400 rupees for a boat ride to India for himself, his wife and two daughters aged 16 and 12. Nine miles from Mannar island, the boat ran into choppy seas and capsized. Only eight of the 38 people aboard survived. The rest died, including Nadesen's wife and oldest daughter. Nadesen swam back to Mannar. On arrival in India 10 days later, he found his daughter, who had drifted to India by clinging to an empty water can.

Life in the Indian camps had been bearable at first. Refugees were allowed to work outside the camps to supplement food rations. But camp rules were tightened after the Gandhi assassination.

In May 1991, India and Sri Lanka forged an agreement for the voluntary return of 120,000 refugees in Indian camps. Over 28,000 returned to Sri Lanka by the middle of 1992, when logistical problems prompted the suspension of the movement. Nadesen was among those who had voluntarily returned to Sri Lanka. But

he is still afraid to go back to his home village, even though the government has cleared the area of LTTE and most displaced persons have since returned.

There are many others who, although apprehensive, have left the camps and returned to their villages to resume normal lives. At Nagarilupankulan village in Vavuniya district, which was recently cleared by the government, Karuppiah Sathivel, 36, grows spring onions, chilis and cabbages. Sathivel had stayed at a camp for internally displaced people for a year. During that time, he says he had "no earnings, no job, nothing." He is now confident peace will hold and his children can go to school.

At an LTTE-controlled village in Mannar district, 54-year-old widow Nadarajah Sethupillai is preparing to plant a one-acre plot she fled in July 1990 to go to India. She returned last September. Her three children are helping her rebuild the small sandstone and brick house that had been destroyed in the fighting. "I had cattle and jewelry before I left for India, now I have nothing," she said. While waiting for the rains so she can begin planting, she gathers honey from the forest to sell in the market. It is a hard life, but it is home. "I will never leave this place again, even if I die here," Sethupillai said.

UNHCR officials have interviewed a large number of returnees, asking them if they were better off now than they were before. They say they have never received a negative reply. Returnees knew they were coming back to a less than ideal situation and have weighed the risks involved. In similar situations in other countries, UNHCR has adapted well, respecting the exercise of the individual's freedom of choice.

UNHCR came to Sri Lanka in 1987, when it was asked by the Colombo government to mount assistance programs for the returnees and displaced people. As resettlement and reintegration programs were winding down, new fighting broke out in mid-1990, triggering a fresh mass flight from affected villages.

With facilities and staff in place, UNHCR developed the concept of Open Relief Centers (ORC), giving displaced people a sort of "safe haven." The centers provide shelter, food, medical assistance and water to people who cannot go back to their villages. For some, the ORCs had offered an alternative to flight to India. But after India and Sri Lanka agreed in 1991 to begin a repatriation program, the ORCs became static camps for returnees and displaced people. The ORCs and other transit facilities now house over 6,000 returnees and some 30,000 displaced persons. UNHCR has helped construct transit centers at Alles Garden in Tricomalee, Asikulam in Vavuniya, and Mannar to accommodate some 7,000 Tamils expected to return from India in mid-August.

Only Madhu has retained its character as an ORC. Combatants have informally agreed to respect the Madhu facility in an LTTE area as a neutral zone, allowing temporary sanctuary for people fleeing fighting in their villages. Hacked out of the jungles, Madhu was a Catholic shrine that in the 16th century gave refuge to Christians who had been converted by Portuguese colonizers and who later fled Hindu persecution.

UNHCR maintains the shelters, water supply and sanitation facilities and provides medical services with support from Medecins sans frontiers and the Sri Lankan Red Cross. The government provides food and runs schools. UNHCR transports the supplies to Madhu.

Government and military officials say that the security situation in "cleared areas" has improved — an assessment shared by human rights groups and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Officials are encouraging returnees and displaced people to go back to their villages. Assistance is being offered to returnees in rebuilding homes and farming land. UNHCR also is initiating "micro projects," such as repair of roads, irrigation facilities and schools as well as skills training.

However, incidents like the July ambush killing of five policemen and the subsequent arrest and disappearance of three youths have caused apprehension among the people on Mannar island, one of the reception sites for the returnees from India which UNHCR chief of mission Hasim Utkan visited recently. The disappearances were the first in several years in the island. Returnees at resettlement villages told Utkan they were happy to be back and did not feel harassed by security forces.

"There is no danger for refugees to come here," Brigadier P.A. Karunatilake, the military commander in Mannar, assured Utkan. "No civilians are being harassed by terrorists. They are only attacking uniformed men."

Karunatilake said efforts were being made to enhance discipline among police, something he has done with his troops. He said he also was tightening security on the island after he found out that banned strategic materials were finding their way to the LTTE. He said his troops are fighting an unreal war in Sri Lanka, noting that the government provides aid to areas even under the LTTE. "You send your enemies food ... everything. You feed them and you fight them too," Karunatilake said.

FERNANDO DEL MUNDO

Returnees knew they were going back to a less than ideal situation and have weighed the risks involved.

conflict

The Australian example

In 1938, at the Evian Conference on refugees, the dour Australian conservative politician Colonel White summed up his delegation's position as follows: "We have no real racial problem (and) we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large scale foreign migration."

Since then, in a reversal of policy which would have shocked Colonel White, Australia has accepted more than half a million refugees and over 5 million immigrants in total. Today, one-quarter of all Australians are overseas born.

Although racism remains a problem here as in other countries, the dramatic shift in public attitudes from the days of the "White Australia" policy can serve as an example for other nations grappling with their own ethnic and racial conflicts.

Coping with racism may have been easier in Australia because of its unique history and geography: despite the White Australia policy, there has always been a cosmopolitan aspect to Australian society, from the first convict arrivals and the Chinese gold rushes.

Some have analyzed Australia's attitude to new arrivals in terms of the national psyche.

Clive Scollay, president of the Arts Council of Australia, looks to Australia's origins as a penal colony for the victims of the Industrial Revolution in England in the late 18th century: "These people arrived, with shattered beliefs, in a new hemisphere with an alien climate and strange life forms. This made the foundation for despondency, but also for a new start, or a new social contract that would not pursue the individual. The tradition of mateship (comradeship), and a profound cynicism about leadership, had their origins there.

"Subsequent immigration has also been based on the same foundations, the same transported baggage of despair: ironically, it has given rise to a community of purpose between different generations of migrants."

But however we attempt to conceptualize the situation, Australians are left with a reality of racism, and the need to overcome it. And there are millions of Australians who are working to do just that.

They include filmmakers such as Daniel Scharf and Marcus D'Arcy, who have taken two contrasting and perhaps equally important media approaches. Following the domestic release, in 1992, of Scharf's movie, "Romper Stomper," there was both surprise and outrage.

Outrage about a film which treated the topics of racial violence and conflict between skinhead neo-Nazis and young Vietnamese refugees in graphic, realistic and horrific detail.

And surprise that this phenomenon existed in Australia at all.

But recent research by Stephen Klimidis and Harry Minas of the Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit shows that one in six Vietnamese adolescents has suffered, or has been threatened with, physical violence based on racism.

"I come from a Jewish German background, my mother was a refugee to Australia in 1936, so the movie was very important to me personally," Scharf said of his controversial film. "The movie was a comment, a mirror, a microcosm of what we see out there. Racism does exist and should be exposed, we should not be burying our heads in the sand. It's a film about ignorance and intolerance."

Another possible response to racism and ethnic hatred is that of filmmaker D'Arcy, who has worked on films as diverse as "Mad Max" and "Lorenzo's Oil." Away from the world of commercial production, he directs quality television documentaries about refugees for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. They include works on Laotian and Cambodian refugees going home, and the Kurdish crisis in Iraq.

D'Arcy grew up in a Catholic family which accepted a stream of resettled Vietnamese refugees in Sydney. "There was always another mouth or two at the table. When you get involved on the human level -- food and beds -- racism just doesn't have the opportunity to emerge. Intolerance is ultimately a lack of understanding, and our home was a positive experience in learning, and learning to live with, each others' ways."

"In our schools, too, we grew up to understand each other, although there were struggles."

Today, D'Arcy sees his refugee films as a means to furthering the cause of understanding in Australian society.

The Indo-Chinese refugees are a special case in Australia.

They were the first major non-white immigrant group in Australia in the 20th century, and the first significant departure from the White Australia policy which had held sway from the beginnings of Australian nationhood in 1901 and before. Indeed, as early as 1855 the colony of Victoria had passed a law banning

Chinese immigrants, a reaction to large numbers of gold rush arrivals.

Essentially, White Australia meant that, disregarding minor variations in practice, it was almost impossible for persons of overseas colored descent to become Australian residents and citizens. Even marriage was not necessarily enough. The policy was the subject of a continuous, and energetic, public debate, and was ultimately severely weakened through the advocacy of the Immigration Reform Group lobby in the 1960s. Official abandonment of the policy took place, incrementally, over the years 1965 to 1973.

The National Museum of Australia currently has an exhibition dealing with the White Australia policy. Controversially, it credits the colorful former Australian minister for immigration, Al Grassby, as the architect of multi-racial Australia. Exhibition curator Ian McShane explains that on searching government files, the clearest change away from the old racist policy came with the Grassby ministry in 1973. "Until then, the visual record of immigration was solidly white. With Grassby, the images changed comprehensively towards other races."

McShane's research also uncovered archival and other material suggesting strongly that the change in policy only came after an intensive administrative battle running parallel to the public debate.

Among those pressing for change were foreign affairs officials, for whom White Australia created an enormous burden in diplomatic contacts and trade and development relations with Asia and the Commonwealth. Holding the line were immigration officials, representing the rough populism of Australian governments of the day.

Another, and perhaps decisive factor, was that the sources of white immigration which had fed the labor pool were beginning to dry up. With increasing prosperity in a rebuilding post-war Europe, Australia was a less attractive destination.

Thankfully, the Indo-Chinese immigrants of the 1970s were not the subject of more violent racial discrimination than earlier waves of non-English speaking immigrants — Greeks, Italians, Yugoslavs and post-war European refugees. Credit must go, in large part, to the policy of multiculturalism championed by another former minister for immigration, Ian McPhee.

Writing in the *Melbourne Weekly* in June this year, Mr. McPhee noted that the large-scale (white) immigration of the 1940s and 50s was based on the expectation that people from different cultural backgrounds could assimilate with minimal help. "Many were factory fodder, others were housebound and did not learn English. They were generally derided as second class residents. They tolerated this for their children's sake. Many had nowhere else to go and little to go back to."

Shortly after the Indo-Chinese refugee flow started, McPhee was the minister who introduced a multiculturalism policy for Australia.

"The object of the policy was to achieve racial or ethnic harmony," he wrote. "Equality comes from access to learning and personal prosperity. It is this which produces harmony. Many people were missing opportunities because of cultural differences such as language and lifestyle.

"In effect, an extended family was created for new arrivals. This was especially important for refugees who often arrived without supportive families.

Essentially, White Australia meant it was almost impossible for people of overseas colored descent to become residents.

"New arrivals were encouraged to retain their language of origin... And whether by good fortune or good luck, bi-lingualism will be especially important for this country in the next century."

The spirit of multiculturalism lives on today in a variety of government-funded community programs for new arrivals.

In Lakemba, Sydney, Velvy Holden runs a work experience training program for refugee women known as ANCCORW Jobskills under the auspices of the Refugee Council of Australia. In the first year of the program she has found places for 97 women with employers who are "responsible and sensitive." Training has been largely in clerical and office skills and child care.

Self-esteem is one major benefit of the program, and Holden believes that this kind of program is a strong antidote to racism, particularly through promoting contact between refugees and employers and other employees.

"The training of employers has been important," she said. "There's the case of one woman in our first intake. It was winter, a cold office, and the employer was insisting she keep the door to her room shut. However, her refugee experience had involved a period of solitary confinement. It will take a long time until she's comfortable with closed doors.

"Another woman had acquired a deep fear of the dark after nighttime experiences in refugee camps, and she found travelling home from work at night unbearable. The solution in this case was to arrange earlier working hours."

In the final analysis, committed Australians like Holden, Scharf and D'Arcy have over the years helped translate policy into action, and represent the foundation stone of their country's defenses against racism and ethnic hatred.

George Lombard

Major Contributors

Of the 136,000 Vietnamese-born people in Australia, Captain Tam Tran and Dr. Tien Dung Kieu are two of many who have already made a significant contribution to their new homeland.

Tran was just 11 when she and her parents arrived in Darwin on the small fishing boat which had carried them to freedom. Her family settled in Brisbane, where she started to learn English and found out about the rules of Australian schoolyards ("We got teased a lot, but you learn to put up with that").

Just 17 years later, as a medical officer in the Australian Army, she was named in the Queen's Birthday Honors in 1992, receiving the Conspicuous Service Medal for her work in "Operation Habitat" assisting Kurdish refugees after the Gulf War.

In October 1992, Tam was named "New Woman of the Year" by the Australian *New Woman* magazine, which stated, "Our winner, Tam Tran, represents the excitement of New Australia moving into a new century."

With the Australian Army, Tran is now specializing in tropical medicine. Although, with her broad Queensland accent, she is now thoroughly Australian, she still hopes that Viet Nam can be better off, and would like to go back and help the Vietnamese people. "But that's a long, long way away," she says.

Tien, now 33, arrived in Australia via a refugee camp in Pulau Bidong, Malaysia, when he was 19.

Two of many who have made a significant contribution to their new country.

His parents had migrated to the former Saigon when Viet Nam was divided by the Geneva Accords in 1954. Later, after Tien earned a place at a Vietnamese university, he had to hide the fact that both his parents had been officers in the South Vietnamese army. Midway through his degree the risks became too great, and he fled.

He also settled in Brisbane, and took casual and shift work until he was able to enroll in the University of Queensland at the beginning of 1981. Since then, Tien has been a research physicist at three Australian universities. After completing his Ph.D. at the University of Edinburgh, he became a resident fellow at Linacre College, Oxford.

Today, Tien is doing research in particle physics at the University of Melbourne, working on "the fundamental particles of matter and how they interact to form matter at all observable dimensions." His work tools are pure mathematics and computers capable of massive calculations.

And Tien's family is thriving. His daughter Vi, 8, recently earned a scholarship to a Melbourne private school, and his wife, Liem Thanh Hoang, is studying for a master's degree in electrical engineering at Monash University.

After living in Scotland and England, Tien feels that Australia is perhaps more isolated from the rest of the world than he would like, but in other respects he is grateful for what it can offer himself and his family.

Tien feels that he has a debt to repay both to the Vietnamese community (with which he is much involved) and his new country. "Australia is a very young and dynamic country, not bogged down in tradition," he said. "While tradition can be good, one can also appreciate its absence here."

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Combatting xenophobia

This summer, a handful of college freshmen from one of the world's richest nations will pay their own way to learn firsthand what it feels like to be homeless and uprooted in an isolated refugee camp.

The Japanese teenagers will travel to northern Kenya to work with more than 10,000 unaccompanied Sudanese boys at Kakuma refugee camp. The summer project has been dubbed "Camp Sadako," in honor of Japan's first U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata.

By the time the students return to Japan in the fall, it's hoped their unique experiences will have motivated them to identify a bit more with the refugee cause and people of other ethnic groups. And perhaps the experience will encourage the students and a few of their classmates to consider careers in the humanitarian field.

"Camp Sadako" is just one facet of UNHCR's new public awareness campaign aimed at increasing sensitivity to the plight of refugees and stimulating the public's desire to actively find solutions to the global refugee crisis.

"We believe the traditional ways of reaching the public — with brochures and exhibitions — are no longer effective enough," said Sylvana Foa, who heads UNHCR's Public Information Section and oversees the ambitious campaign. "With the upsurge in xenophobia, ethnic strife and racism around the world, we decided to tackle the problem from a different perspective, adapting our strategy to what would be most effective in each region."

UNHCR is joining a growing number of organizations and governments trying to combat the rising xenophobic tide, especially in Europe where more and more doors are slamming shut on asylum-seekers.

Public animosity against asylum-seekers reached such a frenzy in Germany that Asian companies in Berlin began giving employees tips on how to dress and behave to ensure they would not be mistaken for Asian refugees.

Ironically, the public's disgust over the growing tendency by young people to resort to violence against foreigners helped spawn Germany's very strong public awareness campaign. Millions of Germans have plastered their cars with "Xenophobia No" bumper stickers, while hundreds of thousands have joined candlelight vigils protesting racist violence. Popular children's cartoons have even devoted several episodes to the subject of racism.

In France, the Ministry of Justice is publishing a guide on anti-racist laws for the public. Spain's successful public awareness campaign included the participation of 76 organizations, including UNHCR. With government financing, the campaign used TV spots, full-page advertisements in national newspapers and subway posters to combat the ignorance that breeds racism.

Among the more innovative ways to combat xenophobia being developed by UNHCR is a rock video with music by the rap group, Soul II Soul. The story is simple. A young man full of anger and hatred leads a group of skinheads in a racist attack. He then finds himself becoming a refugee when his country is plunged into war. What is the message? That hatred only breeds more hatred.

At the same time, UNHCR is working on a cartoon video to teach children 3 to 8 years old about refugees and the dangers of prejudice. Also in the works are radio and television soap operas featuring refugee themes.

Already tested and heralded as a success was a 1992 trip to UNHCR field operations in Kenya, Somalia and Bosnia by major TV and film script writers. The purpose of the trip was to encourage screenwriters to include refugee issues in their scripts and to speak out publicly on behalf of refugees.

At first the writers were skeptical. Refugees are a "down" issue, they said. Then they were reminded that the all-time favorite movies like "Casablanca" and "Sound of Music" are all about people fleeing persecution. Now the writers are committed to the refugee cause.

As part of a global educational project, UNHCR has produced teaching guides to introduce the refugee issue in schools. In the United States, more than 65,000 teachers and 3.3 million U.S. school children ages 8 through 13 benefitted from the exercise. The project is currently being adapted for use in other countries.

A test transit campaign in 1992 involved the display of UNHCR posters on city streets, in airports, in subway stations, inside subway cars and on buses in France, Germany, Switzerland and the United States.

As a result of the campaign, hundreds of letters poured in from people asking what they could do.

Changing people's attitudes is a mammoth undertaking. But there has never been a time when the need to do so was greater.

The tradition of asylum is under grave threat around the world. At the same time, attacks on refugees and ethnic minorities are proliferating.

"It has become chic to become racist," Foa said. "That's particularly worrying. We want kids to grow up thinking racists are dweebs."

Marie Okabe

conflict

Breaking the cycle of violence

Stories of ethnic hatred, xenophobia and racist attacks by neo-Nazi skinheads make headlines almost daily in Germany. But behind the scenes, many Germans are quietly working to combat these evils through a variety of innovative programs. Among them is a six-year-old "anti-aggression program" pioneered by Dr. Jens Weidner at the Hameln Detention Center in Lower Saxony. The program is aimed at changing the attitudes of some of the toughest and most violent right-wing extremist youths.

"Right-wing youths can be reached," Weidner says. "We don't have to give them up for lost. It's worth talking to them."

The Hamburg Land Office for the Protection of the Constitution estimates there are some 50,000 young Germans between the ages of 16 and 20 who are prone to anti-foreigner and similar forms of violence.

"The perpetrators do not spring up from nowhere," admonished German Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker following the 28 May murders of five Turkish women and children in a racist firebombing in the western town of Solingen.

Indeed, there is a familiar pattern in the backgrounds of many young right-wing extremists. Most come from broken homes. More than 50 percent have had little or no vocational training. About 25 percent never finished high school. As a consequence, an estimated two-thirds of violent, right-wing extremists are unemployed.

In its milder form, the aggression and frustration experienced by these youths is vented at weekly football matches — so-called soccer hooliganism. But the next stage is lashing out violently at those who are different, who are easy to blame — at foreigners and asylum-seekers, for example.

Hameln Detention Center's program is one of several in Germany aimed at trying to break this vicious cycle among violent juveniles. Dr. Weidner, who has been a part of the program since it was founded in 1986, first assembled the usual team of psychiatrists, sociologists, psychologists and social workers. To this professional mix he added four repeat violent offenders who cut the academics' theories down to size on the solid bedrock of reality. With the help of this team, anti-aggression therapy was developed in 1987.

Weidner, an educational sociologist, got the basic idea for anti-aggression training during six months of work with violent street gangs in the United States. His basic premise: Treat hoods in a confrontational way because they're used to confrontation. They're not accustomed to sympathy and middle-class methods of gentle persuasion.

So far, 75 youths have undergone the program at the detention center. To start, a foundation of trust is established between the therapist and the youths by talking about their hobbies, their family life, their prison experiences and their hopes for the future. Once this trust has been established, the actual training begins.

During the initial sessions, the youths often like to boast about their aggressive behavior. They stress their recklessness, excitability and impulsiveness. They see themselves as "cool" men of action; fatalistic, tough and respected by their

Treat them in a confrontational way because they're used to confrontation. They're not accustomed to sympathy and middle-class methods of gentle persuasion.

peers. They enjoy arguing with others who do not share their views, often trying to frighten and intimidate them. Always, they keep open the option of violence to end any dispute — an option many Hameln youths have exercised quite brutally in the past.

The youths take a perverse pride in being able to solve problems quickly and on their own, using violent methods if necessary. They like to boast of overcoming a superior foe in what they see as a fair fight, like modern-day Robin Hoods.

Weidner says the aim of his anti-aggression training is to expose the discrepancy between the heroic image these young people have of their violent deeds and the brutal reality of their behavior. In doing so, Weidner does not spare the feelings of his subjects, aggressively questioning, challenging and probing their comments in an effort to force them to reflect on their violent ways.

This method of therapy uses a tried and tested approach — the "hot seat." At each session, one of the youths is put in the hot seat and cross-examined by all of the others for an entire evening.

The sole aim of the questioning is to force the subject to confront the real reason for his violent behavior. After hours of such questioning, the youth is asked to describe in detail how he felt at the exact moment he was committing the act of violence. For many, it is a real shock.

At first, many of the youths try to defend and justify their violent behavior by portraying themselves as the victims, and the real victims as the aggressors. A role reversal takes place, inverting the youths' perception of reality and of themselves.

Often, insults — real or imagined — triggered the assaults. Weidner's program thus places heavy emphasis on focusing as much as possible on the "weak points" and character flaws of the youth in the hot seat in an attempt to examine the real motivation for his violence towards others. Once these weak points are found, the subject undergoes so-called "provocation tests" in which others in the group confront him head on and with increasing intensity over his character weaknesses.

It is not an easy or guaranteed process, but it often works.

Manuel, a 23-year-old man sentenced to eight years' detention for manslaughter, says that before undergoing anti-aggression therapy he was incapable of imagining how his victim might have felt.

"Today, I think any argument can be handled verbally," said Manuel, who is now one of Weidner's therapy team. "Violence isn't absolutely necessary. After all, who likes getting hurt? I don't."

Stephan Mock & Guido Meyer

Togo: A crisis like

Staring blankly ahead, Marie Attiogbe slowly holds up her sole remaining possession — a shabby dress. "Everything is gone," she says quietly, after recounting how her husband was killed by a stray bullet while visiting Togo for his father's funeral.

Refugee Egnonam Waké spends hours, sometimes days, lying motionless on her mat. She never stops crying. Her husband was killed by soldiers in Togo. She doesn't know why. He was accompanying a neighbor who had just given birth in hospital. Only the baby survived. Waké herself is seven months preg-

Togolese refugee children in Cotonou, Benin. The Cotonou hostel is so overcrowded that refugees are unable to stretch out at night to sleep.

PHOTO : UNHCR / C. BERTHAUME

no other

nant. She has no family, no job and doesn't have the strength to look after her little boy.

David Adatsom says he is still terrified. With precise gestures but no outward trace of emotion, he tells how soldiers, who had run out of ammunition, stabbed him in the face, arms and legs, and killed his companion.

Attioghe, Waké and Adatsom are among more than 300,000 Togolese refugees who have fled to Benin and Ghana since February. Many are still in a state of shock, unable to understand the terrifying events that sent them into flight.

Unlike other refugee situations, there is no armed conflict, famine or drought in Togo. Yet, in early February, around 2,000 Togolese left their country every day. Since then, the flow has slowed, but it has never ceased. And there is reason to believe that it will increase again in coming months.

"Usually, refugees flee their country because of war," explained Gabriel Dosseh, a Togolese refugee in Ghana. "In Togo, we are not at war, but we are in a war-like situation. When soldiers leave their barracks and start to fire on defenseless people — women and children — they realize that their safety is at stake and they start to flee."

Tensions have been on the increase in Togo for more than a year. But on 25 January the crisis erupted into violence when soldiers opened fire on pro-democracy demonstrators marching through the capital, Lomé, carrying candles in one hand and a white kerchief in the other as a sign of peace. Seventeen people were killed and dozens wounded. Five days later, soldiers raided the opposition's stronghold in the capital, in the district of Bé, and fired into the crowd at random.

"It was market day," recalled Christine Agbaleti, a 37-year-old market vendor and the mother of a small boy. "I had spread out my wares and was just selling some clothes to a client when I heard gunfire and saw a dozen people fall down beside me. I felt a sharp pain in my back and also fell to the ground. I was the only one to get up, but with difficulty. All those beside me were dead. I dragged myself along on my knees to a house nearby where I received help. By luck, the bullet had just grazed my spine."

Within days, thousands of people — 6,000 was the record for one day — were fleeing to Ghana. The small Ghanaian town of Aflao, situated opposite Lomé, saw its population increase nearly threefold over just a few weeks, growing from 15,000 to 40,000 inhabitants.

"In the beginning, the situation was disastrous," said François-Xavier Doudou-Kiadila, the head of UNHCR's mission in Ghana. "Conditions were deplorable. People were sleeping in the streets. The town's infrastructure was — and still is — overloaded. There is not enough water. It is impossible to dig a well without hitting salt water because the town is below sea level. The sanitary facilities were already inadequate before the refugees arrived and the water level is so high that the latrines overflow. There is not enough accommodation."

The vast majority of Togolese refugees in Ghana and Benin are living with friends and relatives. There is only one refugee camp, Klikor, near Aflao in Ghana, and a hostel, the *Maison du peuple*, in Cotonou, Benin.

"How could we do otherwise?" said Désiré Viera, Minister of State in Benin. "Everyone has relatives in Togo. Even the president. His mother is Togolese. He himself has 70 members of his family staying with him. Togolese refugees are at home here."

But this leads to serious problems, not the least of which is to ▶

> Usually, refugees flee their country because of war. In Togo, we are not at war, but we are in a war-like situation.

▶ locate the refugees in order to register them, determine their exact number, and distribute the necessary aid.

"They are our brothers," continued Viera. "We must accept them, but this raises problems. It is a very difficult situation for us. We are just emerging from a bad period. The economy is only just starting to recover after 17 years of a military-Marxist dictatorship. The arrival of 300,000 refugees all at once leads to all sorts of problems. We ourselves are at the limit of self-sufficiency. The situation is creating pressure on our economy."

The people of both host countries have been very generous, making room in their homes and sharing their kitchens and other facilities. However, the host families are now overwhelmed. "When a family only has just enough to satisfy the needs of five people and it is suddenly called upon to feed 30 more, resources quickly become scarce," said Luis Cueto, a UNHCR field officer in Ghana.

From taxi drivers to market vendors, the people of Benin have generously offered to share employment opportunities with the Togolese — sometimes to their despair. Competition in the markets, for example, has become fierce as Togolese women — born tradeswomen — lower prices to make a sale.

Ghanaians and Beninese have given the refugees land to cultivate, but there are not enough tools or seeds for everyone.

Because they share the same culture and the same language — French — the refugee children were able to fit into the already overloaded Beninese school system. Many classes now have up to 80 pupils each. "Our infrastructure was already inadequate. We do not have sufficient classes. We do not have enough desks and benches," said the director of education in the department of Mono, André Kakpo. "We have had to turn away pupils because of the lack of materials. We are going to have major problems at the beginning of the school year if nothing is done."

The Togolese refugees say schools for their children are as important as water or food. Almost all the refugees are urban dwellers for whom the education of their children is a priority.

UNHCR has placed education of the refugees — both in Benin and in English-speaking Ghana — on an equal footing with water, food and housing.

UNHCR's approach is the same in all these sectors. "Our goal is to help those who assist the refugees by improving the infrastructure, the water supply, the sanitary system, medical care, schools," said Doudou-Kiadila. "Allowing refugees to share the life of the local inhabitants — to attend their schools, to live in their houses — results in living conditions which are much higher than those in a refugee camp, however well-organized it might be."

But funding is needed to make the program work. A $10 million appeal launched by UNHCR on 25 May had raised only $4.3 million by mid-July.

The host communities cannot continue much longer without aid. Signs of strain are already evident. The populations of some villages along Ghana's northern border doubled over a period of just a few days, prompting local leaders to ask UNHCR to open camps.

Klikor, presently the only camp in Ghana, will soon reach capacity. Its population of 4,500 refugees is growing by the day. The camp now houses the most needy of the refugees — those who have no relatives in Ghana, or who have had to leave their host families because they can no longer afford to take care of them.

The same situation is unfolding in the hostel in Cotonou, Benin. Refugees are flooding to the *Maison du peuple*, a concert hall turned reception center for the most needy refugees. The center is so overcrowded that the refugees cannot even stretch out at night to sleep.

"We are now in the rainy season," said Etienne Ringlet, in charge of the UNHCR office in Benin. "People cannot sleep outside as they did before. Half of Cotonou is flooded, including

Togolese refugees living with relatives in Porto Novo, Benin. Beninese have willingly shared their homes.

PHOTO: UNHCR C. Bocchetti

Togolese refugees crossing the Mono River separating Togo and Benin.
PHOTO UNHCR C. Bermann

Togo is gradually emptying. Two-thirds of the capital's inhabitants have fled. Lomé is almost deserted. The port is abandoned. Schools are closed.

the refugee center."

And refugees continue to flee from Togo. "We thought that the crisis would only be temporary," said Viera, the Beninese minister of state. "We thought it would be over in a few months. Now we fear that it will last much longer."

Togo is gradually emptying. Two-thirds of the capital's inhabitants have fled. Lomé is almost deserted. The chimneys of the phosphate factories on the city's outskirts no longer belch smoke. The port is abandoned. Schools are closed. Petrol stations are deserted.

Bé, called the Togolese Soweto, is empty, its marketplaces deserted, its shops shuttered, its bullet-scarred homes padlocked.

In some districts, the city is a little more animated, in part because of the presence of some 200 refugees who daily cross the border to work in Togo, but return at night.

"It is no longer possible to go outside in Lomé after 8 p.m.," said Yao Amegbleame, a 32-year-old Togolese refugee. "It is too dangerous. You are not even safe within your own four walls. The soldiers carry out raids at night and kill everyone in the houses. It is also at night that one can hear gunfire from the army barracks where the government is purging the army by eliminating opponents of the regime." An increasing number of soldiers are seeking asylum in Ghana and Benin.

The inhabitants of Lome who sought refuge in the surrounding countryside are also going into exile. The insecurity in the capital is gradually extending all over Togo and the economic situation is deteriorating, made worse by a long general strike.

"Our greatest fear is a civil war in Togo," said Beninese Minister Viera. "We know how civil war begins, but never how it ends. One Liberia in the region is enough."

CHRISTIANE BERTHIAUME

MOZAMBIQUE

Starting from scratch

Crossing the Malawi border to return to their homeland is no big deal for Mozambican refugees — they've been shuttling back and forth across the frontier for years.

But soon, hundreds of thousands of the Mozambican refugees will be making what they hope will be their last border crossing for a long time. No longer will they have to return to Malawi for food or to send their children to school or to the doctor. With help from UNHCR and its partners, they will be going home for good.

There is peace today in Mozambique, and an estimated 200,000 refugees have already returned home spontaneously.

The voluntary repatriation of more than 1.5 million Mozambican refugees scattered in six neighboring countries — Malawi, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and South Africa — represents the biggest such operation ever undertaken by UNHCR in Africa.

Taking three years at an estimated cost of more than $200 million, the Mozambique repatriation program presents a huge challenge for UNHCR. Foremost among the many obstacles is the mammoth and painfully slow process of rebuilding an entire country shattered by 16 years of warfare.

"We should not bring people back to conditions that may be worse than refugee camps," said David Lambo, UNHCR coordinator for the Mozambican repatriation operation. "If they don't have food, schools and health centers in Mozambique, they'll go elsewhere to find those basic needs. And where? Back to the refugee camps."

The first Mozambican refugees to go back under the UNHCR repatriation program left Zimbabwe on 12 June for Barue district in Manica province. "We were very afraid that the returnees would remain for days at the reception center in the town of Honde," said Lambo. "But they very quickly left the center for their final destination. They were eager to go back. Among them was an old lady suffering from cancer who asked us to be on this first repatriation because she wanted to die in her own country."

> Among the returnees was an old lady suffering from cancer who said she wanted to die in her own country.

The rehabilitation of Mozambique's infrastructure is essential for the success of UNHCR's repatriation operation.

Mozambique, more than twice the size of Germany, has to be re-

Returnees in Tete province, Mozambique. An adequate supply of food will ensure that the returnees can stay in their homeland.

PHOTO : UNHCR / C. SATTLBERGER

built from the ground up. Roads are unusable because of years of neglect or because they have been mined. Bridges have been blown up. Clinics and schools have been destroyed. Every building bears the scars of war. Millions of Mozambicans do not even have a roof over their heads.

"Conditions vary from one place to another," explained UNHCR program officer Catherine Huck. "Maputo, for example, is a booming city with towering buildings and a busy market. But it is an island of wealth in the middle of desperation. To travel less than 30 kms outside the capital is like going back in time. The war almost completely cut them off from the outside world. You find starving people."

There is also much insecurity, including roaming gangs of bandits who prey on people who have only recently emerged from the bush after years of hiding to resettle themselves in their former homes. In the countryside, there is no money and no employment. In desperation, people turn to banditry.

Before the war, Mozambique was an agricultural country with little industry. Today, tens of thousands of former rural dwellers have flocked to the overcrowded cities because there is nothing left to support them in the countryside.

An estimated 3-4 million Mozambicans are displaced within the country, and their numbers are being swollen by returnees who are trying to pick up the pieces of their lives.

"Many returnees go back first to their place of origin," said Huck. "But when they get there, many find their families have moved, so they go out to find them."

"Still others refuse to go back where they came from because of the security situation. People who have settled along some of the main roads will probably stay there indefinitely for fear of the security situation in less developed areas."

The problems present a big dilemma for UNHCR.

"We know the picture is not ideal," said Lambo. "But we don't have much choice. Refugees are asking us to bring them back home. Since the signing of the peace agreement on 4 October 1992, more and more refugees are growing impatient as they see the cease-fire holding and prospects for a lasting peace improving."

The countryside is slowly opening up, although some Renamo-controlled areas are still not as accessible. Nevertheless, non-governmental organizations are now able to reach areas that a few years ago were accessible only to the International Committee of the Red Cross. As recently as May of this year, for example, the district of Machazé in Manica province was reachable only by air. Now aid reaches the area by road.

Since end of May, 6,200 U.N. Blue Berets have been deployed in the country to supervise the cease-fire and escort humanitarian convoys. An additional 354 U.N. military observers are being posted in regional centers to oversee the demobilization of 107,000 government troops and 21,000 Renamo soldiers. Some of these men will join the new 30,000-member army. This critical task is a necessary prelude to the start the electoral process. Elections are now scheduled for the last half of 1994.

Hopes for Mozambique's recovery have been boosted by the return of rains after the worst drought of the century. Food production is considerably up on last year, with a few surpluses in some provinces. If both the rains and the cease-fire hold up, the number of people needing food aid could drop below 1 million in 1993-94, down from 3.5 million in 1992-93.

Christiane Berthiaume

▲ *The sprawling Shamsabad refugee settlement in Khorasan province grew into a town of 30,000 during the nearly 14 years since the first Afghans sought asylum in the neighboring Islamic Republic of Iran. About one-fifth of the Shamsabad population has now left for their war-torn homeland.*

▲ *The refugees say they want to return home. But they cannot mask their worries about the future. Afghanistan, one of the world's least developed countries before the 1979 Soviet invasion transformed it into a Cold War battlefield, is littered with mines and lacking in basic necessities. Health, water and sanitation facilities are virtually nonexistent.*

At the border, each returnee is entitled to $25 in cash and 50 kilograms of wheat. Each family also receives a piece of plastic sheeting to serve as a temporary shelter if needed. UNHCR and the World Food Program began providing the assistance package in December 1992. ▼

PHOTOS: UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN

Afghans in Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been host to one of the world's largest refugee populations, providing them with education, health care, jobs and, in some cases, even land. By mid-1993, the number of Afghans in Iran stood at 2.4 million.

UNHCR is facilitating, rather than promoting, voluntary repatriation from Iran. Still, Afghans are going home in ever increasing numbers.

Contributing to the exodus is the relative stability that awaits them in western Afghanistan, from where most of them fled to Iran.

There have been disturbing reports about undue pressure on Afghans to repatriate, including cases of deportations, imprisonment, the stripping of refugee identity cards and closure of refugee-owned businesses by regional authorities in Khorasan province. In mid-July, however, there were encouraging signs the situation was improving.

CAMBODIA

Turning barren fields into rice paddies

A group of Cambodian returnee families has formed a commune in the middle of nowhere and called it Phum Reaksmey Samakipheap, or "Light of Solidarity." They know they have to work together if they are to turn the barren fields of Oudong in Kompong Speu province into rice paddies.

Kompong Speu was not a preferred destination for the 370,000 Cambodians who returned from more than a decade in exile in Thailand over the past year. Many chose to settle in the fertile northwestern provinces of Battambang, Pursat, Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey. But there was not enough land in the region. If there was, it was either littered with land mines or inaccessible.

The settlers of Phum Reaksmey Samakipheap knew land was a problem in the country where 90 percent of the people are farmers growing rice, the staple diet. Long before they joined UNHCR's voluntary repatriation operation, the settlers had looked into farming possibilities.

In August 1992, the leader of the settlers, Phan Sothy, came to Oudong, where he used to play as a

boy. He took samples of the soil for examination by agriculturists and was told it was potentially good for growing rice. He spread the news in the camps. Thirty-four families initially joined him at Oudong, and about 50 more were waiting to move once basic facilities were in place in the commune.

"Our problem is water," said Phan Sothy. "If we have enough water, we should be all right." He said the settlers needed help to dig wells, repair a nearby irrigation dam built during the French era and construct a schoolhouse and, perhaps, a medical clinic. A former district chief and army officer, the 45-year-old Phan Sothy began knocking on the doors of U.N. agencies and NGOs in Phnom Penh seeking assistance for his commune.

UNHCR negotiated with UNICEF to dig three wells in the commune under its Quick Impact Projects, or QIPs, launched jointly with the United Nations Development Program as part of an integration program for returnees. Patterned after a highly successful experiment in Nicaragua, the QIPs program addressed problems common in a country whose social and economic infrastructure had been devastated by two decades of war.

By July, UNHCR had committed nearly its entire allocation of $9.5 million for QIPs. The projects included the repair of 238.5 kilometers of roads and 22 bridges, the provision of 1,362 wells and 15 ponds, 771 latrines, housing supports, upgrading services in 64 hospitals and health clinics, construction and rehabilitation of 376 schools, preparation of 14,000 hectares of rice land, income-generation schemes and assistance to vulnerable people. The projects, implemented in coordination with some 60 agencies and volunteer groups, were for a short term and were aimed at benefiting both returnees and the community where they had settled. They were designed to fit into UNDP's longer term development program.

Because many returnees settled in the four northwestern provinces, most projects were concentrated there. Communes being built in other provinces received some assistance from UNHCR, but relief officials said the magnitude of the problems in Cambodia was so great that rehabilitation funding was insufficient.

"Practically everything at some stage was destroyed," said Leo Goulet, an official of the UNDP-sponsored Cambodia Resettlement and Reintegration Program, or CARERE. "Here, you have to do everything from scratch." For the returnees and the vast majority in the country of 9 million people, life is a constant struggle to make ends meet. Few jobs are available. Security is a problem. Many recall the easy life in the camps, when rice came regularly on relief trucks.

Since the warring factions signed the peace accords, the international community has laid out plans to help in the reconstruction of Cambodia. In February 1992, an $880 million Marshal Plan-style assistance program was pledged to the country, which had been long deprived of external aid. But the flow of assistance was tentative as cease-fire ▶

The Quick Impact Projects provide for the construction of wells like this one used by returnees at Chamkar Samrong settlement, Battambang province.
PHOTO: UNHCR / A. ROLLET

Another Quick Impact Project produces concrete supports for houses built by returnees in the Sisophon area.
PHOTO: UNHCR / A. ROULET

violations and non-compliance threatened to scuttle the accords.

The elections supervised by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia last May have given some degree of confidence that Cambodians could sort out their problems peacefully. Upwards of 90 percent of the voters, defying threats of violence, went to the polls, affirming their commitment to peace and stability. But even as Cambodia struggled toward democracy, relief workers said normalcy could only be achieved with the infusion of massive foreign aid to speed up reconstruction and development.

Returnees, internally displaced persons and the unemployed welcomed emergency projects financed by international organizations for the temporary income they provided and the benefits they brought to their community. Hundreds of them, for example, were hired to work in land preparation and road repair initiated by UNHCR. Workers were paid the equivalent of between $1 and $1.50 a day. In many areas, QIPs became vehicles for reconciliation. Followers of different factions worked together in various projects. New road networks crossed faction-controlled areas. Newly established schools also were used as community centers. Water wells and ponds were shared by villagers.

But even as Cambodia struggles toward democracy, normalcy can only be achieved with the infusion of massive foreign aid to speed up reconstruction and development.

Returnees without relatives to go back to or land to farm in the northwest either went elsewhere on their own or formed groups to look for appropriate resettlement sites, such as the one Phan Sothy was trying to build.

Gnem Sophat, 50, who returned from Thailand in January, was one of the first to join Phan Sothy at Phum Reaksmey Samakipheap, 15 kilometers from the main highway, Route 5. Speaking over tea at his thatched hut, he said settlers were having a hard time, traveling at least four times a day to fetch water from a well at a neighboring village several kilometers away.

"Life in the camp was good," said Gnem Sophat. "We had security. But we had no future there. I prefer this place. This is my country. We can have land. We can grow rice." He was not waiting for his 400-day food ration to run out. Beside his hut was a small vegetable garden and a flock of chickens scratching about, encouraging signs that this hard-working group of returnees is breaking away from a life of dependence and despair.

FERNANDO DEL MUNDO

No time to look back

When Khoun Sopan stepped off a UNHCR convoy in Cambodia after 17 years of exile in refugee camps in Thailand, she had high hopes for a prosperous new life.

The 32-year-old woman was accompanied by her husband and three children. Returning as a family on that January day meant everything to Khoun Sopan, helping her to overcome the fear of making a new beginning in her war-devastated homeland.

Like many of the more than 370,000 refugees who joined UNHCR's 13-month voluntary repatriation operation completed in April, Khoun Sopan looked forward to becoming a rice farmer. The family was going to help organize a commune in Kompong Speu province.

"The place was very remote. There was nothing there," she said later. Still, she was going to try. But soon, she became heavy with her fourth child. Then, her husband abandoned her and the children. She decided she could not go into farming alone.

Khoun Sopan drifted back to Phnom Penh, the city she fled in 1975 after her parents and six of her brothers and sisters were taken from the family home and killed. She had fled the capital toward the Thai border. Her two younger sisters and a brother starved to death before reaching safety in the Thai camps. Today, Khoun Sopan is the sole survivor of her family of 12.

But all that is history, Khoun Sopan said as she sold vegetables at a Phnom Penh market recently, still insistent as ever on rebuilding her shattered life.

Khoun Sopan's painful story is a familiar one in Cambodia. Similar tragedies are told by countless returnees, internally displaced people and others who have fallen victim to years of civil strife. Their courage and refusal to give up in the face of almost overwhelming odds are an inspiration to all of those who are working to see Cambodia and its people rise up from the ashes.

After leaving Kompong Speu for Phnom Penh, Khoun Sopan took advantage of a credit program offered by the Jesuit Refugee Service, a religious volunteer organization. JRS helps amputees, the elderly, widows and women heads of household to set up small businesses. The start-up loans are financed under UNHCR's Quick Impact Projects scheme — part of an integration program for returnees and others who need help.

Khoun received a loan of 300,000 riels ($80) to start her vegetable market business.

> People get realistic very quickly. They realize now that things aren't going to come to them on a silver platter.

"At the moment, the business is going well," she said. "I can survive on my earnings." She said she had been able to set aside 3,000 riels a day to pay off the loan.

Sao Sunlee, 46, a former refugee who is JRS's credit supervisor, said about 130 loans had been made since the program began in December.

Sister Denise Coghlan, the local JRS representative, said the returnees seem to be getting on with their lives. "People get realistic very quickly," said the Roman Catholic nun from Brisbane, Australia. "They're all finding something to do. They realize now that things aren't going to come to them on a silver platter."

As in other QIPs, the beneficiaries of the JRS credit facility are not only returnees, but all Cambodians who need help. "We don't want to create an elite class of people," said Coghlan.

Most returnees say life is more difficult now. But Khoun Sopan prefers the freedom of Cambodia to confinement in Thailand.

"In the camp, I never earned a single baht (the Thai currency). To me it was like a jail," she said. "Unlike in the camp, here I can go wherever I want to go, to earn a living. I see a future for my children. There are schools here. They can study and have a good job and stand on their own, so they won't have to depend on anyone."

It doesn't take much to help courageous survivors like Khoun Sopan. Because despite everything, they have never lost their faith in the future.

FERNANDO DEL MUNDO

UNHCR strengthens security for staff in the field

On the afternoon of February 1, Reinout Wanrooy, a UNHCR staff member working in Afghanistan, was traveling on the road from Peshawar to Jalalabad along with two U.N. colleagues and two Afghan drivers. As they neared Jalalabad, three unidentified gunmen in a blue pick-up overtook them and started shooting at the two clearly marked U.N. vehicles. After forcing the U.N. cars to a halt, the gunmen jumped out and opened fire on their victims at point-blank range. Three men died instantly, while one of the Afghan drivers, fatally wounded, died later in hospital. Reinout Wanrooy managed to escape unscathed by jumping from the car and running as fast as he could, dodging a hail of gunfire. After the gunmen left, Wanrooy emerged from the bushes where he was hiding and flagged down an International Committee of the Red Cross vehicle for help.

This is but one of a series of chilling security incidents involving UNHCR staff members in recent months. The incidents include death threats, robberies (personal belongings, equipment, vehicles), occupation of offices by political groups or refugees, kidnappings, arrests by local authorities, physical assaults, rape and murder.

Field work for U.N. staff in many parts of the world has become downright dangerous. In 1992, an average of one staffer involved in U.N. activities was killed each month. By mid-1993, the figure had climbed to one a week.

In 1992, an average of one staffer involved in U.N. activities was killed each month. By mid-1993, the figure climbed to one a week.

Among all civilian U.N. agencies, UNHCR is perhaps the most exposed to danger. Since its involvement in northern Iraq in April 1991, UNHCR has been increasingly called upon to act in the world's most dangerous trouble spots: Kenya, Somalia, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and, of course, former Yugoslavia.

As the High Commissioner's Special Envoy to former Yugoslavia from November 1991 to June 1993, Jose Maria Mendiluce was in many precarious situations and knows firsthand the need for better security awareness in the field.

"We've been shelled, bombed and sniped at so many times that you actually get used to it and don't really measure the danger anymore," Mendiluce said. "At first, you think being shot at is the most dangerous situation, but after a while you realize there are worse situations, like being held up by an uncontrolled armed group without adequate communications."

Mendiluce was involved in just such an incident in April 1992 when he was traveling from Belgrade to Sarajevo by car and was stopped by extremist Serbian "White Eagles" near the border town of Zvornik.

"They were "cleaning up" the town of Muslims, carrying out the worst atrocities right before our eyes," Mendiluce said. "When they realized what we had witnessed, they arrested us and became very aggressive. I thought they would surely kill us because they couldn't afford having us as witnesses.

"When I tried to communicate to our nearest office through our car's CODAN radio, I realized the radio wasn't functioning. But I had the presence of mind to pretend I was communicating not only to our office but to their leaders in Belgrade as well. The White Eagles fell for the ploy and that is what saved us."

Mendiluce said the incident demonstrates how "our most important security asset in a war situation is good communications, although the irony in this example is that our communications equipment totally failed." It also underscores the importance of keeping cool in a tight spot. "In dangerous situations, you can't go around flashing your U.N. laissez-passer and hide behind your U.N. humanitarian mandate," he said.

"The problem of working in former Yugoslavia is that most of us became accustomed to the danger. At first you think there is no way you're going to take that level of stress, but you find that as the weeks and months go by not only are you still functioning but you've become addicted to the stress."

Mendiluce cited the example of UNHCR staff in Sarajevo, who must live and work in a war zone for months on end.

"For the first few months they would conscientiously wear their flak jackets," he said. "Then, as they got used to the danger, the tendency would be to take it off. They didn't want the people in the city to see them wearing flak jackets when they themselves had none. You end up being so involved in the operation, so attuned to the people's suffering, that you end up thinking: 'What the heck if I die?' Many, many times we've had to remind our staff to take basic precautions."

How does an organization weigh the risks in a place like former Yugoslavia? When does it simply become too dangerous to carry on? According to Maryan Baquerot, UNHCR's Director of Personnel who is also responsible for establishing the organization's security policy, "we keep pushing further and further our tolerance threshhold in terms of security, but there is one point beyond which we will not go on and that is when we become direct targets or ▶

The days of opening a UNHCR office, operating for months and then finding out that you need a security plan are over. Security will now become an integral part from the start.

▶ when it becomes simply impossible to deliver our assistance."

In Mendiluce's opinion, there is no objective measure. "Each decision we took, to send or to not send a convoy, to brave a check-point or not, these decisions were not taken on the basis of any abstract measurement of the risk factor, but on a cost-benefit estimation of the impact of our actions," he said. "If we knew that tens of thousands of people in besieged towns like Srebrenica, Gorazde or Zepa needed our convoys in order to survive, then we would risk sending in the convoys. For us, risk was directly proportionate to the needs and to the impact of our actions. If we hadn't been saving people's lives, all the risks we were taking would have made no sense. This knowledge is what kept our staff so motivated."

According to Mendiluce, the three most important security assets of any high-risk UNHCR operation are: good communications, good equipment (including flak jackets, helmets and armored vehicles) and an excellent movement control system to keep track of the locations of staff members at all times.

But he decries the fact that flak jackets and armored vehicles often take months to reach the field and that there aren't enough to go around.

"Emergencies don't wait around for armored vehicles," he said, adding that if UNHCR is to continue being involved in high-risk operations, then the staff on the ground must feel that the administration in Geneva really cares about their safety. "And that is not the impression we had in the early stages in Yugoslavia and it is not the impression I've had in the 15 years I've worked with UNHCR... I believe UNHCR must update its security mechanisms to protect its staff. And I don't mean more pension funds for the staff in Geneva. I'm talking about the staff in the field who are risking their lives. What they need is a system that will supply them with flak jackets and armored vehicles fast."

To be fair, the Yugoslavia experience has been a new one for UNHCR and, in many ways, for the U.N. as a whole. In U.N. operations worldwide, for example, the security phases run from one to five, with phase one calling for precautionary measures, followed by restricted movements of staff, relocation of non-essential staff, suspension of programs, and finally, full-fledged evacuation. In some areas of former Yugoslavia, UNHCR staffers are now working in situations well beyond the limits of the scale. This is so unprecedented that UNHCR's whole thinking on security matters can be divided between before and after Yugoslavia.

Before Yugoslavia, UNHCR's only security arrangement — apart from communications equipment and security guards on office premises — was a part-time, non-specialized security coordinator in the personnel section at the Geneva headquarters. In case of evacuation, UNHCR depended entirely on the U.N. security plan and on the UNDP resident representative in a particular country, whose responsibility it is to implement the plan.

With Yugoslavia, UNHCR quickly recognized its thinking on security matters was outdated. In September 1992, UNHCR hired Jim Vale, a security consultant with a military background. Vale later became the first UNHCR field security officer. His first mission was to former Yugoslavia where he briefed the staff on basic security precautions and made concrete recommendations such as placing sandbags in front of office windows.

Vale also helped design a pocket-sized UNHCR security "aide memoire" that staff in the field can carry with them at all times. The handbook covers subjects ranging from personal security to radio and convoy procedures, evacuation, counter ambush and crowd control procedures, first aid, navigation and survival techniques, self defense and rules to follow when confronted with mines and explosives.

The advice is simple, concrete and to the point. Some samples: "Don't become emotionally involved with people you are trying to help. Never promise assistance that you cannot deliver. If stopped by armed aggressors, don't resist, act docile but stay alert, avoid eye contact... If fired upon get out of vehicle opposite the side of the shooting, move out of the line of fire, take your pack and radio, scatter but don't separate. Always reverse into parking spaces..."

At the same time, UNHCR has created an entirely new security structure that becomes operational this summer. A security coordinator has been hired at the senior level, as well as two field security officers based in Geneva. Each of them will supervise security advisers based in risk-prone field locations. The novelty of this approach is that all of these security advisers, including the senior coordinator, have extensive security backgrounds. Says Vale: "This represents a mental quantum leap in UNHCR's thinking on security mat-

ters." But, he cautioned, "I believe UNHCR should stay away from the military image; it should jealously preserve its humanitarian spirit."

A further refinement in UNHCR's new security structure has been the hiring of a private British consulting company to come up with a training program for staff members. In the spring and summer of 1993, the group traveled to former Yugoslavia and to Kenya and Somalia to look at UNHCR's most dangerous operations in order to devise staff training modules which will also be shared with NGO partners.

"The days of opening an office, operating for months and then finding out that you need a security plan are over," Vale said. "Security will now become an integral part of any UNHCR office from the very beginning."

Staff are going to be taught new techniques like evasive driving, survival and navigation techniques, first aid and even self-defense.

Vale is particularly worried about the risk of rape for female staff and UNHCR is debating whether it is appropriate to teach them self-defense in this respect. "If you're going to use self-defense you had better be sure you're going to win," he said. "Because if you don't, the alternative is you might get killed. And how can self-defense help you if you're the victim of a gang-rape?"

No options are being left unexplored for the protection of staff, including the possibility of using a walking stick or even MACE, the paralysing spray that is supposed to ward off attackers.

Drawing on the experience of former Yugoslavia, stockpiling of equipment is another area where UNHCR recognizes progress must be made. To avoid shortages of life-saving items, UNHCR is looking into ways of stockpiling things like communications equipment, flak jackets, armored vehicles, alarm systems, car parts, whistles, medical kits and generators.

The new UNHCR thinking on security also includes close coordination with other U.N. agencies, particularly the office of the U.N. Security Coordinator who has overall responsibility for the U.N. system, as well as with NGOs. Ideally, the cost of deploying security advisers in danger zones should be shared among all the agencies concerned to avoid overlapping and unnecessary expenditures. So far, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNDP have been developing their own security arrangements.

"Although we're all going in the same direction, we're doing it our own separate ways," Vale said. "It is important that we pool our efforts. War against the U.N. is going to become a theme of despots in the future. The U.N. will continue to be blamed and manipulated and used as a pawn by all sides. Security will have to become professionalized at all levels. That is why security has become the flavor of the month, so to speak. And in this new ball game, UNHCR is leading the way."

Sylvie Girard

The long road to Gorazde

When the first convoy in almost a month rolled triumphantly into Gorazde in early May, people lined the streets to welcome UNHCR. News of the event spread throughout the media.

But little if any publicity is given to behind-the-scenes negotiations that are required to get relief supplies into a besieged enclave — the food and medicine necessary to save lives.

During April, UNHCR was thwarted in its efforts to get convoys into Gorazde because Bosnian Serbs insisted upon inspecting the weapons and ammunition of the Canadian UNPROFOR escort — and the Canadians refused. The principle was admirable, but that didn't lessen the need of the people of Gorazde for food and medicine. Thus, UNHCR decided to go it alone, minus military escort, even though it meant going through two front lines.

Larry Hollingworth, UNHCR chief of operations in Sarajevo at the time, took on the job of getting the convoy through. On April 27, he drove to Pale to begin negotiations at the Bosnia Serb Refugee Commission. After lengthy talks, permission was refused on the allegations that the Bosnian Muslim forces had launched an attack in the area and it would be too dangerous for UNHCR to proceed. On the way back to Sarajevo, he stopped for discussions with the Serb military authorities in Lukavica. He was promised a meeting with a high-ranking military officer the following day.

The next day the officer was unavailable, but Hollingworth was told by Lukavica authorities the Muslims were shelling Rogatica, which is en route to Gorazde. Hollingworth then spoke to a Bosnian defense official who denied the Bosnian forces were shelling the town. Hollingworth again negotiated with Serbian liaison officers and that afternoon talked by phone with Bosnian Serb Gen. Milovanovic who said he did not object to the convoy going to Gorazde, but was concerned about the safety of UNHCR -- repeating the allegations about Muslims shelling Rogatica.

Hollingworth returned to speak with the Bosnian government official, who reaffirmed there was no shelling he was aware of, even by paramilitary forces, and assured Hollingworth he would spread the word to all Muslim forces that UNHCR was coming. Hollingworth then discussed the situation with UNHCR headquarters in Belgrade and the decision was made to keep the convoy trucks loaded and standing by in case permission came.

On April 29 Hollingworth returned to Lukavica where he talked with Milovanovic who said he had no objections to the convoy. In fact, he said it could proceed to Zvornik, but he needed political approval for it to go into Gorazde.

Milovanovic asked Hollingworth to grant a television interview to a Bosnian Serb station. He did and said before the cameras: "UNHCR is committed to delivering humanitarian aid to all sides as needed, whenever and wherever possible."

Convoy to Gorazde drawn by Nedzad Dedic, a Bosnian child.

He also mentioned that Serb checkpoints are a "showcase to the world" and the personnel there should be chosen as carefully as the Serbs choose diplomats.

Upon being advised of the status of the negotiations, UNHCR Belgrade decided to move the convoy to Zvornik on Saturday after receiving confirmation from Dr. Karadzic that the convoy would be allowed to proceed to Gorazde, and that the inspection in Podromanija would take only about two hours.

On May 1, Hollingworth, other UNHCR staff members and Dr Risto Tervahauta of the World Health Organization proceeded to the checkpoint at Podromanija. The 10-truck convoy arrives at 11:30 a.m. We await the arrival of the inspection team. The inspection finally begins about noon. The inspectors are polite and courteous, but rather slow. At 2 p.m. they break for lunch, but to our surprise they are back in one-half hour. Unfortunately, they leave again at 3:30 p.m., saying they are unable to get a fork lift to examine the wheat flour until morning.

We spend the night on the side of the road. The inspectors arrive at 9 a.m. with a new head man. He says yesterday's inspection was not professional. Everything that was inspected must be re-inspected. Without getting into minute details, the convoy finally leaves Podromanija at 3 p.m., glad to be on the road even though the inspection took almost two days rather than two hours.

The convoy arrives at Rogatica at 3:40 p.m. We wait for permission to pass through the town. After one hour and 20 minutes, we get it. A few kilometers down the road, we come to the spot where a previous convoy lost a truck to a mine. We carefully check for mines — as carefully as humanitarian aid officials can — and proceed across the heavily damaged road.

We carefully check for mines -- as carefully as humanitarian aid officials can -- and proceed across the heavily damaged road.

The road is strewn with rocks and boulders and we often are required to stop and clear the road before the convoy can pass. Eventually we arrive at the barrier erected by the Gorazde defense forces. We suspect it is mined. We had hoped the barrier would have been removed, but it, obviously, was not. We honk the Land Rover's horn, yell, "UNHCR" and whistle loudly. In about 30 minutes two lean defenders of the road descend from the hills. We were right. There were mines. They remove them and call for earth-moving equipment to shove the barrier out of the way.

These two Bosnian fighters have been surviving on their hunting skills, taking game from the familiar hills. We share our food with them and they are grateful to get it.

Artillery echoes across the hills and a sniper's round rings out. We take cover behind the Land Rover. By 7:30 p.m. it becomes apparent that the machinery to remove the barrier isn't going to arrive. Communications apparently have broken down somewhere along the line. Hollingworth decides to attempt to breech the barrier with the big trucks. First — with the help of the Swedish drivers and the two Muslims — we begin digging at rocks and dirt with our hands, sticks and the single shovel we have. A truck pushes at the barrier with a towing rod. Eventually we get enough of the barrier removed for a truck to try to drive over it. It takes several attempts, but it finally makes it over. Then another truck and yet another succeeds. Then we try the smaller vehicles. Some get stuck but a truck pushes them over. Soon we are on our way again. At 9 p.m. we come upon a Bosnian outpost. They send for an escort who takes us into Gorazde. People line the road, waving and cheering us on. We know we are welcome.

The food is gratefully received and we are grateful to deliver it. While in the Gorazde enclave we visit a local Serb village to check on a list of residents given to us by the Bosnian Serb authorities. All are present and accounted for. They maintain they want to stay in their homes and say they are well treated by the local Muslim officials. There is no evidence of property damage and the residents say they are in good health, but, as everyone else in the area, they could stand more food.

This village is located in a remote but beautiful valley lined with blossoming fruit trees, and when the residents say they have no desire to leave, it is easy to understand why.

JOHN MCMILLAN

Former Yugoslavia

Rape as a weapon of war

Investigators say as many as 20,000 women may have been raped in the brutal conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Most of the victims and their families remain hidden, refusing to talk about their horrible ordeal. A few, however, have come forward to tell their stories.

Bahrija cannot forget the barbarity of the war.

"When we arrived at the Trnopolje camp, they raped 10 women right in front of me," Bahrija said. "Some of them were very young.

"It lasted for days on end. Some of the women's throats were slit after they were raped. I was forced to witness all of it."

Suddenly, Bahrija's voice breaks: "My wife was among them... I tried to defend her and my children. I told them I would rather they kill me. But they just beat me up and continued." Bahrija falls silent, then gets up and hobbles out of his family's miserable room in the refugee center on the outskirts of Zagreb. His left leg is partly paralyzed, a reminder, along with his missing front tooth and torn upper lip, of his stay in the prison camps. Curled up on a nearby bed, Fatima, his wife, covers her face as she weeps.

Collective and public rapes, often in front of family members — husband, parents, children — are unfortunately a common occurrence.

"Rapes are the worst things I remember," says 12-year-old Adnan, as he sits next to his mother. He is the family's youngest child. His eyes, haunted by what he should not have seen, are somber.

"The other terrible thing is when my brother was tortured in front of me." His brother Muhamed was kicked and beaten all night with sticks and truncheons until he was abandoned in a coma. His back was completely black and blue, and his nose was broken.

"We were arrested on June 9, the day of my sixteenth birthday," recalls Muhamed. Neighborhood after neighborhood, the Bosnian Serb militia methodically deported every Muslim from the small Bosnian town of Trnopolje. In a matter of minutes, the four of them were forced to abandon their comfortable home and everything that was familiar. They were sent to a school used as a detention camp. Between 4,000 to 5,000 Muslims were packed inside the wooden barracks, with barely enough room to lie down.

"Every single night, the rapes and tortures would resume," says Bahrija as he returns to the room. "In the morning, they would throw the bodies in a coal mine, up to 20 per day."

He says that was much less than in Omarska camp, where he was deported a month later. He described Omarska as a torture camp for men, where the dead would each day compensate for the arrival of five or six buses filled with new prisoners. Exchanged for Serb prisoners, Bahrija was finally able to find his wife and two sons, who were freed a few weeks earlier. They found sanctuary in a transit center near Zagreb.

Bahrija's wife has stopped crying but she remains silent. With a lost and pathetic expression, she opens a notebook and, as always when the pain is too hard to bear, starts writing a poem:

"*Pain envelops my soul.*
Where am I now?
Where was I before?
I no longer feel any joy.
The past and the suffering,
those are the only things
I have left."

The story of this family is not exceptional. The face of every refugee hides a personal drama. But the scenario is almost always the same: City or village overrun, houses and mosques burned to the ground, Muslim families deported, tortured, raped...

In Bosnia, rape has been used as a weapon of war, to humiliate and destroy Muslim families. Some eyewitness accounts even mention cases of women who are held and repeatedly raped until they become pregnant. They are freed only when it is too late for an abortion. In the view of the perpetrators, in this case

the Serbs, the children born of this barbarous union are Serbian. Thus rape becomes a method of ethnic purification.

In the Sveti Duh hospital in Zagreb, the number of deliveries has risen by 50 percent, which means that the three delivery rooms are always full. Pregnant women are crammed eight to a room that normally holds four. Others lie down on stretchers in the hallways.

How many of them have been victims of sexual abuse? It is impossible to say. "Most of them protect themselves behind a wall of silence," notes psychiatrist Monique Bydlowski from Médecins du Monde. "It is easier to talk about torture than about rape. That is because, on top of the physical and psychological trauma, overpowering feelings of guilt prevent these women from freely expressing themselves."

On January 18, Bydlowski was summoned by a gynecologist at the Sveti Duh hospital to examine Emira, a young Muslim woman plunged in a deep depression. She had just given birth to a child she decided to abandon.

With infinite gentleness, Bydlowski asks Emira about her family, her studies, her life before the war... Suddenly, Emira breaks down and confides her secret: "The Chetniks came to our village last April 25. One day I was summoned to the town hall in Klujc to pay some bills. As I walked out of the office, a militiaman pushed me into another room, covered my mouth with a blanket and raped me. I tried to fight him off, to scream. I started to bleed."

Emira was 19 and a virgin. "Then, another militiaman asked my tormentor whether I was 'good.' He answered that I was tasty. I was raped a second time... When they ▶

A doctor examines an abandoned baby in a Croatian hospital.

photo: UNHCR / P. Deloche

▶ finally let me go, I ran all the way home, but I didn't say anything to my mother or to my sisters. I've kept it all inside."

Thin, anemic, her face drawn, Emira closes her eyes before continuing, her voice dropping to a whisper. "A short time later, the Serbs arrested every man in the village and executed around 50. The others, including my father, were taken to a camp in Gradiska. Then they burned some of the houses and locked us up in the ones they spared. That's when I realized I was pregnant. I wanted to have an abortion. But how could I escape? After four months, they finally let us go after we signed a declaration giving up all our goods and property."

When they finally let me go, I ran all the way home, but I didn't say anything to my mother or to my sisters. I've kept it all inside.

Emira continued to hide her pregnancy until the very last day. Officially, she is hospitalized for kidney problems.

"I want to forget. Please help me forget," she cries. She was unable to even lay eyes on the child born of such trauma.

The other alternative is abortion, although it is condemned by the Muslim community. In 1992, the Petrova hospital in Zagreb performed 730 more abortions than in 1991. Because of detention, displacement, lack of information and fear, many women are unable to meet the legal deadline for abortion. A special commission was created to examine the cases of traumatized women who are more than 12 weeks pregnant and who want an abortion.

"When Nesimka arrived at the Petrova hospital, she was 28 weeks pregnant," said Jarmila Skrinjaric, a Croatian psychiatrist. "She wanted an abortion, but it was already too late. The news was a shock to her. We decided to keep her in the hospital. Over the last month, I've been seeing her every day.

"Finally, she gathered the courage to tell me her story. When the Chetniks took her town near Gorazde, they locked her up in a house with other women. She was raped by about a dozen of them. The first two had been her neighbors... At dawn, she was able to escape through the bathroom window. She walked towards the village of her sister-in-law, with whom she had left her 10-year-old daughter. She never told them what happened.

"When she realized she was pregnant, she immediately left in search of a place where she could have an abortion. It was a long and perilous journey on foot through Serb territory until she finally reached Croat-held territory. From there she took a bus to Zagreb, too late for an abortion. Nesimka has finally accepted the birth of her baby, although she refuses to keep it. She is increasingly willing to talk to me about her family: her daughter left behind with her sister-in-law, her husband who may be a prisoner or dead. She hasn't heard from any of them. Although she still goes through very depressive phases, she has found the strength to smile. Sometimes."

But for every one of those who are able to talk, many more remain silent, withdrawn, unable to share their humiliation.

"Such a trauma can rarely be expressed in words," explains psychiatrist Evelyn Granjon of Médecins du Monde. "It is usually expressed by the body, especially with pregnant women, who are physically and psychologically more vulnerable. It is through miscarriages, hypertension and premature births that these women tell of their woes. It is therefore essential that they be assisted by a doctor."

Médecins du Monde recently opened a prenatal care center for pregnant refugee women. "This center is not only for rape victims," emphasizes Granjon. "We don't want to create a ghetto." The teams are made up of Bosnian and Croatian gynecologists who can identify the traumatized women and discreetly refer them to psychiatrists, who are also Bosnians or Croats.

"By having Bosnians and Croats work together, we hope to show that some kind of integration is possible," Granjon said. "But I'm not very optimistic..."

Xenophobia and ultra-nationalism are making dangerous inroads in Croatia, and refugees are often scapegoats for economic and other social ills. Recent fighting between Bosnian Croats and Muslims has also added to the tensions. The long ordeal of these suffering women and their families may be only just beginning.

Philippe Granjon & Pascal Deloche

Reflections after refusing a borderline application for refugee status

I didn't believe him -- after only one short hour!
Why was I so unwilling to believe his story?
How could I doubt he'd been interrogated,
threatened, beaten, tortured, jailed?
I who lived an easy, well-paid life — in free Hong Kong —
Judged that he'd not been persecuted — back in Viet Nam,
a place to which I've never been!
What do I know of communists — or communism,
or what persecution is — or even poverty?
When was I ever forced to take sides against my will,
live under tyranny, experience civil war?
When did I last suffer for my nationality, my race
my social group, my faith
or my political opinion?

My Chief and others of the Board who went to Viet Nam
on tours officially conducted — by communists (!) —
returned convinced that all his fears of persecution
were no longer justified,
as if time alone had mended all
and the regime had changed!
"Oh! Torture is relative," they said,
"only a matter of degree, for everyone in Viet Nam
is beaten up when held in custody!"

photo: UNHCR L Taylor

Yet, how was I so sure that all his words were lies?
How could he ever pass our acid tests?
Was I so certain that he only fled
from poverty, not persecution?
Had he not been mortified enough
for me to set him free?

Was my compassion so fatigued
that I denied him the benefit of my doubts?

"Oh!" I said. "I'd heard it all before, from others;
he had been counselled, skilfully,
to fabricate his statement so it fell
within the fivefold definition
of what makes a refugee!"

Think! I forced him back to Viet Nam!
And who'll protect him there?
Can the UNHCR check up
on more than two in twenty who've returned?
(and most of them were volunteers).
But — as I cannot now undo what's done —
all I can do is ask my friends
who still adjudge those yet unscreened
"Please be more generous than I
and give them the benefit of your doubts."

HUGH WALKER

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Hugh Walker worked from July 1990 until April 1992 as a member of the Hong Kong Government's Refugee Status Review Board. During that time he personally analyzed and summarized hundreds of individual applications from Vietnamese seeking refugee status. He submitted the above verse to* **Refugees**

ECHO: Rapid response

For many humanitarian organizations, the Kurdish crisis after the Gulf War provided an opportunity for a thorough review of operations. ECHO — four letters which imply a rapid response — was no exception.

The 1991 crisis highlighted the failings of the European Community's system of emergency humanitarian aid, especially its inability to react rapidly to such a tragedy.

The reason was simple: aid services were too diversified. Different departments handled emergency aid for humanitarian services, for food and for natural disasters.

ECHO, or the European Community Humanitarian Office, was set up in April 1992 with a staff of 48 to coordinate efforts of member states in order to help swiftly and efficiently all countries in need outside the community. It has sent teams to combat a cholera epidemic in Latin America, to assist victims of devastating floods and volcanic eruptions, and to help refugees in Asia and Africa.

"In the beginning, the Community concentrated on economic union," said Antonio B. de Menezes, ECHO's spokesman. "During the course of its development, the social aspect became increasingly important, then monetary and political issues, and now, with the end of the Cold War, the humanitarian aspect has taken on unprecedented dimensions."

By setting up a single humanitarian department, the European Commission has made sure that all the capabilities required to tackle emergencies are now under one administrative entity. "This is the only way to respond effectively to the increasing number of humanitarian crises, which are occurring on an unparalleled scale in the troubled 1990s," said de Menezes.

"Today, if we hear on the morning news that there had been a disaster, we would want to find a partner during the morning and sign a financing agreement before lunch so that the planes can leave the same evening with relief assistance."

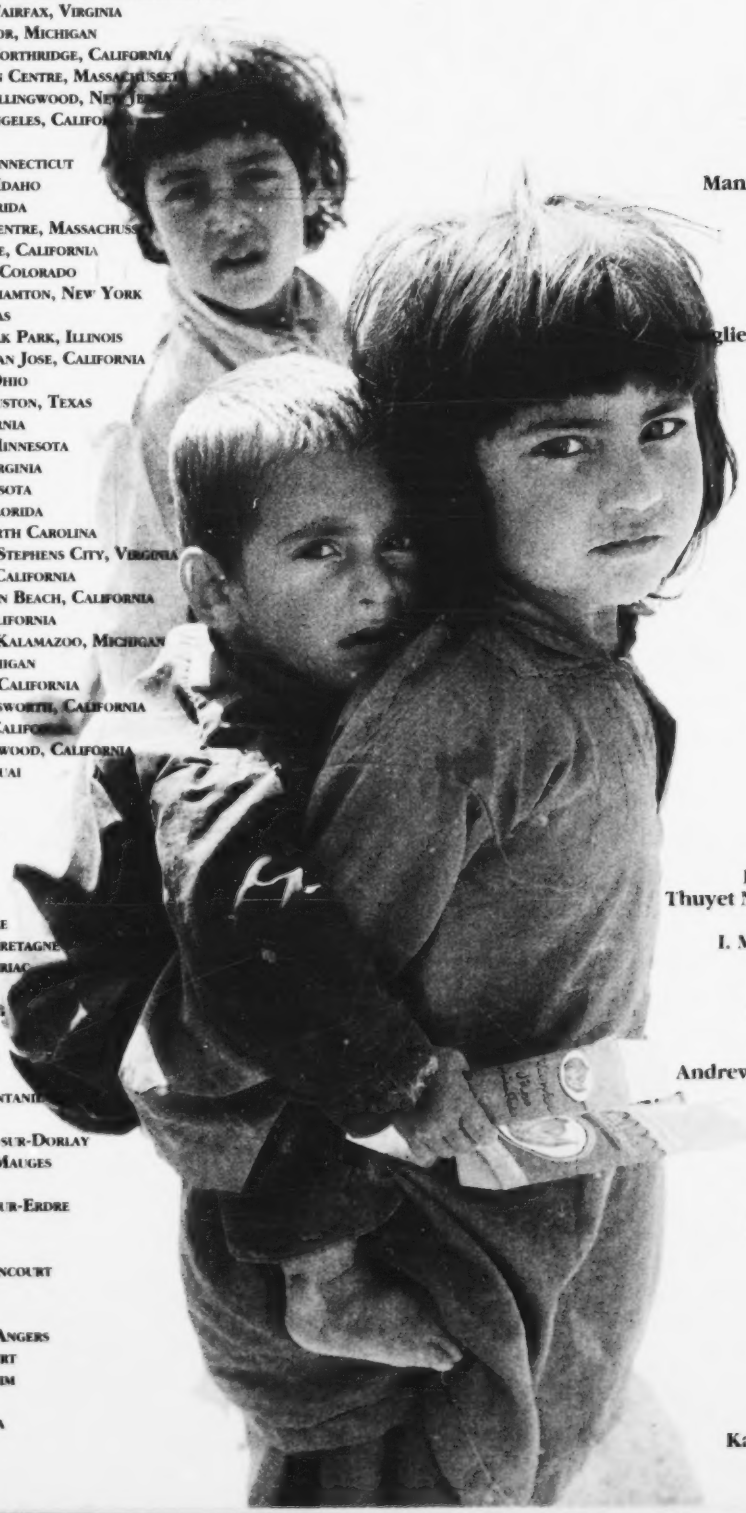
ECHO will increasingly become the operational arm of the European Community for international organizations such as the United Nations, the Red Cross and non-governmental organizations, instead of simply a donor, said de Menezes. The European Community is UNHCR's second largest donor.

By setting up a single humanitarian department, the European Commission has ensured that everything required to tackle emergencies is under one administration.

ECHO has been operating in Croatia since September 1992, and in Serbia and Montenegro since December of that year. More than 550,000 family parcels and over 50,000 tons of food have been distributed by ECHO to war victims in those regions. ECHO decided to undertake this direct action because it became obvious that the operational capacity of traditional partners was insufficient to deal with such large-scale crises.

"The European Commission does not seek to do what its partners have been doing in the humanitarian field for a long time because they will always do it better due to their experience and knowledge," says ECHO Director Santiago Gomez-Reino. "It is not a question of replacing or competing with traditional humanitarian aid sectors, but rather filling in what is lacking." ■

UNHCR and the world's 18 million refugees would like to thank those who have contributed so generously. Among the thousands who reached deep into their pockets were:



Maureen Harambasic, Mesa, Arizona
Phil Alden Robinson, Universal City, California
Barbara R. Sipowicz, Evanston, Illinois
Mohammad & Ruhi Sami, Dickinson, North Dakota
Maryland International Health Task Force, Baltimore
Mohammad Siddiq & Ghazala B. Khan, Miami, Florida
Grinnell College Student Government, Grinnell, Iowa
Patrick & Judith Hanlon, Fairfax, Virginia
Douglas M. Jewett, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Martin & Dorothy Early, Northridge, California
Timothy J. Pattison, Newton Centre, Massachusetts
Patricia Anne Meenan, Collingwood, New Jersey
Ernestine D. Nance, Los Angeles, California
Jean Cogill, New York, N. Y.
K & A Masonry, Weston, Connecticut
Scott M. Harris, Sun Valley, Idaho
Beth Bennion, Seminole, Florida
Harriet Solomon, Newton Centre, Massachusetts
E.A. Hetherington, Lafayette, California
Janet S. Wood, Fort Collins, Colorado
Elizabeth Thompson, Binghamton, New York
Zaisar Razi, Fort Worth, Texas
Stephen E. Schlesinger, Oak Park, Illinois
Carol Barrows Feldman, San Jose, California
D.H. McCarthy, Cincinnati, Ohio
L.E. Edwards Students, Houston, Texas
Lac Duc Bui, San Jose, California
Marylin Tamsky, St. Paul, Minnesota
Laurie Juliana, Arlington, Virginia
Bj Swierzbin, St. Paul, Minnesota
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Martha & Soseph Knight, Stephens City, Virginia
Au H. Nguyen, Santa Clara, California
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Patric Magoon, Concord, California
Oras U. & Irene Kanerva, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Guy Buzzannco, Saline, Michigan
Phil Robinson, Los Angeles, California
Richard Friedenberg, Chatsworth, California
Barry Bedig, Sherman Oaks, California
Stephanie Liss, North Hollywood, California
Marie-Louise Demailly, Douai
Marie-Louise Peckeu
Jacques Gentil, Grenoble
Gislaine Marion, Le Creusot
Charles Carle, Saint Ismier
Janine Esparrell, Millau
François Jaillais, Tours
Michel Josnin, La Chevroliere
Ernestine Orriere, Dol-de-Bretagne
Gabriel Desfontaine, Bourbriac
Yves Morvan, Saint Brieuc
Marthe Andreux, Sarrebourg
Pierre Ravel, Saint Etienne
Maurice Pigny, Montrichard
Paul Bouvet, Allemond
M. Dominique Dagron, Fontanil
Imelda Caillon, Campbon
Pascale Verdier, La Terrasse-sur-Dorlay
Odile Bureau, Bourgneuf-en-Mauges
Pierre Jacquot, Paris
Joseph Martin, La Chapelle-sur-Erdre
Robert Lavole, Lyon
Yvette Meriaux, Bron
Thérèse Ringenbach, Bessancourt
M. d'Estalenx, Paris
Marc Ennaji, Poissy
Jenny Loncol Lebeaupin, Angers
Jean-Marie Mattler, Hericourt
Pierre Scheidecker, Hoenheim
Magib Bendjema, Drancy
Alfredo Moscianese, Ancona
Pietro Casarotti, Brescia
Dante Ferraris, Cuneo
Francesca Vellano, Torino

Cecily Marsh, Burgess Hill School for Girls, West Sussex
Cavagna, Brescia
Elisa Bertoni, Brescia
Amnesty International, Milano
Corpo Volontari del Soccorso, Ravenna
Luigi Zampi, Cagliari
Teresa Pezzoli, Bologna
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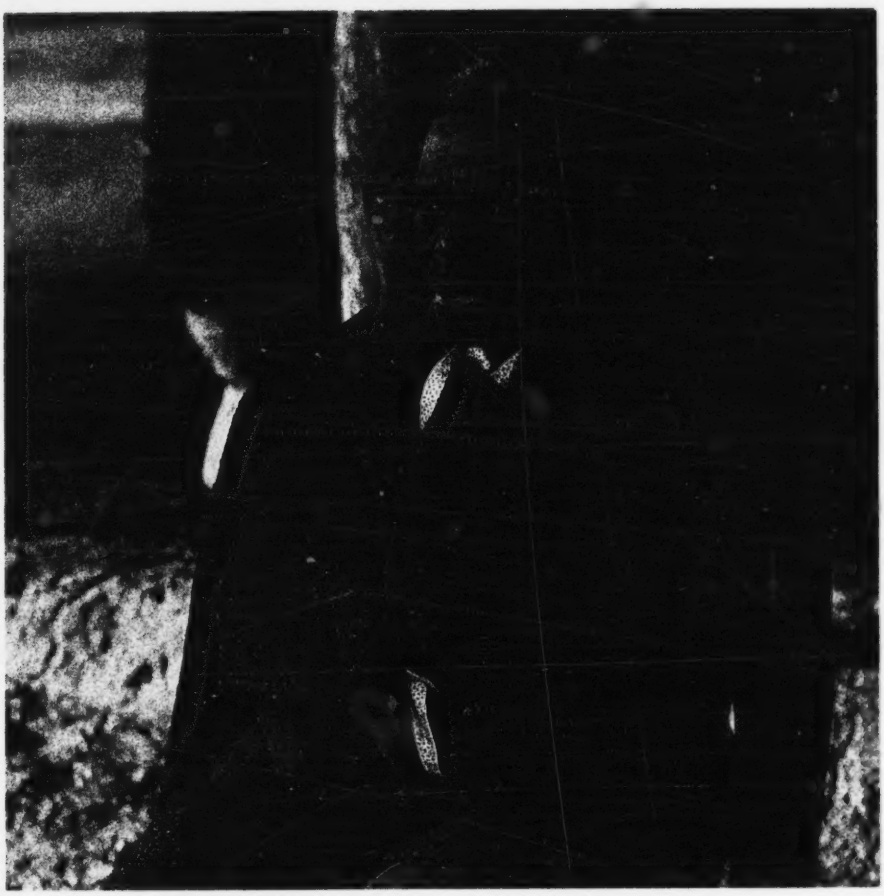
Takeshi Yuzawa, Nagano
Toshio Kaido, Kyoto
Philip Marshall, Fairbanks, Alaska
Thuyet Nguyen, Fountain Valley, California
Frank Wonneberger, Berlin
I. MacPherson & P. Cleary, London
A.R. Deplagne, Lille, France
J. Arthur Bergeron, Montreal
Jeanine Plante, Beauport, Quebec
Ruth Mandel, Toronto
Reza Rokhsat, Neishabour, Iran
Andrew Shillvig, Ne. Woodbridge, Suffolk
Hai V. Le, Richmond, Canada
Audrey Eyries, Ventabren
Hubert Aizannon, Bante, Benin
O. Fallot, Marsannay-la-Cote
A. Sage, Saint Fons
M. Badier, Colmar
D. Ingremeau, Fontaines Dozillac
P. Sanchez, Esquille
Tran Van An, Rennes, Vaud
C. Haham, Paris
Sarah Deplagne, Toulouse
F. Jeannetot, Riedisheim
Mireille Blanc, Nice
M.S. Andeault, Alfortville
H. Bernard, Garches
Victor Turks, San Francisco
Kazuya Shiraishi, Ithaca, New York
Xuan Than Pham, Ontario
F.T. Ramsay, Ottawa



In some ways, becoming a refugee makes life desperately simple.

And empty. No home, no work, no decisions to take today. And none to take tomorrow. Or the next day.

Refugees are the victims of persecution and violence. Most hope that, one day, they may be able to go home. Or, at least, be allowed to rebuild their lives in a sympathetic environment. To exist again in more than name.

UNHCR is there to help refugees. Your attitude can be the difference between hope and despair.

We need <u>your</u> help to help refugees.

UNHCR ACTION
P.O. Box 2500 CH - 1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland

UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees